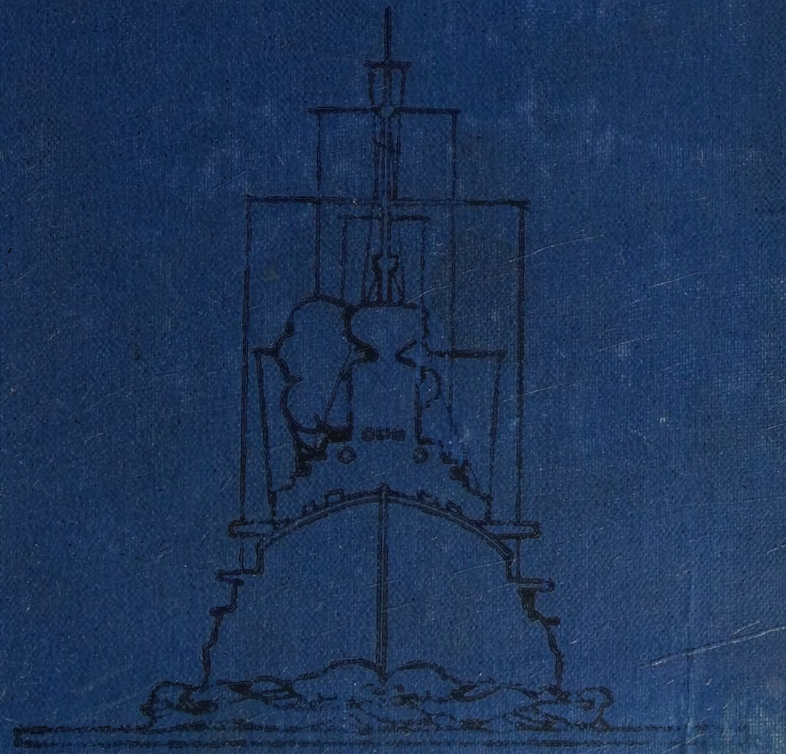
A TALL SHIP
ON OTHER NAVAL OCCASIONS
By "BARTIMEUS"



D. E. S. Balton.

A TALL SHIP
ON OTHER NAVAL OCCASIONS

BY

"BARTIMEUS"

Author of "Naval Occasions"

"All I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
* *
And a laughing yarn from a merry fellow rover,
And a quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over."

JOHN MASEFIELD

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To
H. M. S.

PREFACE

It is almost superfluous to observe that the following sketches contain no attempt at the portrait of an individual. The majority are etched in with the ink of pure imagination. A few are "composite" sketches of a large number of originals with whom the Author has been shipmates in the past and whose friendship he is grateful to remember.

Of these, some, alas! have finished "the long trick." To them, at no risk of breaking their quiet sleep—*Ave atque vale.*

"Crab-Pots," "The Day," and "Chummy-Ships" appeared originally in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and are reproduced here by kind permission of the Editor.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
1.	Crab-Pots	9
2.	The Drum	32
3.	A Captain's Forenoon	48
4.	The Seven-Bell Boat	68
5.	The King's Pardon	90
6.	An Off-Shore Wind	104
7.	The Day	116
8.	The Mummers	141
9.	Chummy-Ships	156
10.	The Higher Claim	175

A TALL SHIP

I

CRAB-POTS

1

In moments of crisis the disciplined human mind works as a thing detached, refusing to be hurried or flustered by outward circumstance. Time and its artificial divisions it does not acknowledge. It is concerned with preposterous details and with the ludicrous, and it is acutely solicitous of other people's welfare, whilst working at a speed mere electricity could never attain.

Thus with James Thorogood, Lieutenant, Royal Navy, when he—together with his bath, bedding, clothes, and scanty cabin furniture, revolver, first-aid outfit, and all the things that were his—was precipitated through his cabin door across the aft-deck. The ship heeled violently, and the stunning sound of the explosion died away amid the uproar of men's voices along the mess-deck and the tinkle and clatter of broken crockery in the wardroom pantry.

"Torpedoed!" said James, and was in his conjecture entirely correct. He emerged from beneath the debris of his possessions, shaken and bruised, and was aware that the aft-deck (that spacious vestibule giving admittance on either side to officers' cabins, and normally occupied by a solitary Marine sentry) was filled with figures rushing past him towards the hatchway.

It was half-past seven in the morning. The Morning-watch had been relieved and were dressing. The Middle-watch, of which James had been one, were turning out after a brief three-hours' spell of sleep. Officers from the bathroom, girt in towels, wardroom servants who had been laying the table for breakfast, one or two Warrant-officers in sea boots and monkey jackets—the Watch-below, in short—appeared and vanished from his field of vision like figures on a screen. In no sense of the word, however, did the rush resemble a panic. The aft-deck had seen greater haste on all sides in a scramble on deck to cheer a troopship passing the cruiser's escort. But the variety of dress and undress, the expressions of grim anticipation in each man's face as he stumbled over the uneven deck, set Thorogood's reeling mind, as it were, upon its feet.

The Surgeon, pyjama clad, a crimson streak running diagonally across the lather on his cheek, suddenly appeared crawling on all-fours

through the doorway of his shattered cabin. "I always said those safety-razors were rotten things," he observed ruefully. "I've just carved my initials on my face. And my ankle's broken. Have we been torpedoed, or what, at all? An' what game is it you're playing under that bath, James? Are you pretending to be an oyster?"

Thorogood pulled himself together and stood up. "I think one of their submarines must have bagged us." He nodded across the flat to where, beyond the wrecked debris of three cabins, the cruiser's side gaped open to a clear sky and a line of splashing waves. Overhead on deck the twelve-pounders were barking out a series of ear-splitting reports—much as a terrier might yap defiance at a cobra over the stricken body of its master.

"I think our number's up, old thing." Thorogood bent and slipped his arms under the Surgeon's body. "Shove your arms round my neck. . . . Steady!—hurt you? Heave! Up we go!" A Midshipman, ascending the hatchway, paused and turned back. Then he ran towards them, spattering through the water that had already invaded the flat.

"Still!" sang a bugle on deck. There was an instant's lull in the stampede of feet overhead. The voices of the officers calling orders were silent. The only sounds were the lapping of the waves along the riven hull and the inter-

mittent reports of the quickfirers. Then came the shrill squeal of the pipes.

"Fall in!" roared a voice down the hatchway. "Clear lower deck! Every soul on deck!" The bugle rang out again.

Thorogood staggered with his burden across the buckled plating of the flat, and reached the hatchway. The Midshipman who had turned back passed him, his face white and set. "Here!" called the Lieutenant from the bottom of the ladder. "This way, my son! Fall in's the order!" For a moment the boy glanced back irresolute across the flat, now ankle deep in water. The electric light had been extinguished, and in the greenish gloom between decks he looked a small and very forlorn figure. He pointed towards the wreckage of the after-cabin, called something inaudible, and, turning, was lost to view aft.

"That's the 'Pay's' cabin," said the Doctor between his teeth. "He was a good friend to that little lad. I suppose the boy's gone to look for him, and the 'Pay' as dead as a haddock, likely as not."

Thorogood deposited the Surgeon on the upper deck, fetched a lifebuoy, and rammed it over the injured man's shoulders. "God forgive me for taking it," said the latter gratefully, "but my fibula's cracked to blazes, an' I love my wife . . ."

All round them men were working furiously

with knives and crowbars, casting off lashings from boats and baulks of timber on the booms, wrenching doors and woodwork from their fastenings—anything capable of floating and supporting a swimmer. The officers were encouraging the men with words and example, steadying them with cheery catch-words of their Service, ever with an eye on the forebridge, at the extreme end of which the Captain was standing.

On the after shelter-deck the Gunner, bare-headed and clad only in a shirt and trousers, was, single-handed, loading and firing a twelve-pounder as fast as he could snap the breech to and lay the gun. His face was distorted with rage, and his black brows met across his nose in a scowl that at any other time would have suggested acute melodrama. Half a mile away the shots were striking the water with little pillars of white spray.

The figure on the forebridge made a gesture with his arm. "Fall in!" shouted the Commander. "Fall in, facing outboard, and strip! Stand by to swim for it!" Seven hundred men —bluejackets, stokers, and marines—hurriedly formed up and began to divest themselves of their clothes. They were drawn up regardless of class or rating, and a burly Marine Artillery-man, wriggling out of his cholera belt, laughed in the blackened face of a stoker fresh from the furnace door.

"Cheer up, mate!" he said encouragingly. "You'll soon 'ave a chance to wash your bloomin' face!"

The ship gave a sudden lurch, settled deeper in the water, and began to heel slowly over. The Captain, clinging to the bridge rail to maintain his balance, raised the megaphone to his mouth:

"Carry on!" he shouted. "Every man for himself!"—he lowered the megaphone and added between his teeth—"and God for us all!"

The ship was lying over at an angle of sixty degrees, and the men were clustered along the bulwarks and nettings as if loath to leave their stricken home even at the eleventh hour. A muscular Leading Seaman was the first to go—a nude, pink figure, wading reluctantly down the sloping side of the cruiser, for all the world like a child paddling. He stopped when waist deep and looked back. "'Ere!" he shouted, "'ow far is it to Yarmouth? No more'n a 'undred an' fifty miles, is it? I gotter aunt livin' there. . . ."

Then came the rush, together with a roar of voices, shouts and cheers, cries for help, valiant, quickly stifled snatches of "Tipperary," and, over all, the hiss of escaping steam.

"She wouldn't be 'arf pleased to see yer, Nobby!" shouted a voice above the hubbub. "Not 'arf she wouldn't! Nah then, 'oo's for

compulsory bathin'. . . . Gawd! ain't it cold! . . ."

* * * * *

How he found himself in the water, Thorogood had no very clear recollection; but by instinct he struck out through the welter of gasping, bobbing heads till he was clear of the clutching menace of the drowning. The Commander, clad simply in his wrist-watch and uniform cap, was standing on the balsa raft, with scores of men hanging to its support. "Get away from the ship!" he was bawling at the full strength of his lungs. "Get clear before she goes——!"

The stern of the cruiser rose high in the air, and she dived with sickening suddenness into the grey vortex of waters. Pitiful cries for help sounded on all sides. Two cutters and a few hastily constructed rafts were piled with survivors; others swam to and fro, looking for floating debris, or floated, reserving their strength.

The cries and shouts grew fewer.

Thorogood had long parted with his support —the broken loom of an oar—and was floating on his back, when he found himself in close proximity to two figures clinging to an empty breaker. One he recognised as a Midshipman, the other was a bearded Chief Stoker. The boy's teeth were chattering and his face was blue with cold.

"W-w-what were you g-g-g-oing to have for b-b-b-breakfast in your m-m-mess?" he was asking his companion in misfortune.

Hang it all, a fellow of fifteen had to show somehow he wasn't afraid of dying.

"Kippers," replied the Chief Stoker, recognising his part and playing up to it manfully. "I'm partial to a kipper, meself—an' fat 'am. . . ."

The Midshipman caught sight of Thorogood, and raised an arm in greeting. As he did so a sudden spasm of cramp twisted his face like a mask. He relaxed his grasp of the breaker and sank instantly.

The two men reappeared half a minute later empty handed, and clung to the barrel exhausted.

"It's all chalked up somewhere, I suppose," spluttered James, gasping for his breath.

"Child murder, sir, I reckon that is," was the tense reply. "That's on their slop ticket all right. . . . 'Kippers,' I sez, skylarkin' like . . . an' 'e sinks like a stone. . . ."

Among the wavetops six hundred yards away a slender, upright object turned in a wide circle and moved slowly northward. To the south a cluster of smoke spirals appeared above the horizon, growing gradually more distinct. The party in one of the cutters raised a wavering cheer.

"Cheer up for Chatham!" shouted a clear

voice across the grey waste of water. "Here come the destroyers! . . . Stick it, my hearties!"

* * * * *

After a month's leave James consulted a specialist. He was a very wise man, and his jerky discourse concerned shocked nerve-centres and reflex actions. "That's all right," interrupted the thoroughly startled James (sometime wing three-quarter for the United Services XV.), "but what defeats me is not being able to cross a London street without 'coming over all of a tremble'! An' when I try to light a cigarette"—he extended an unsteady hand—"look! . . . I'm as fit as a fiddle, really. Only the Medical Department won't pass me for service afloat. An' I want to get back, d'you see? There's a super-Dreadnought commissioning soon——"

The specialist wrote cabalistic signs on a piece of paper. "Bracing climate—East Coast for preference. . . . Plenty of exercise. Walk. Fresh air. Early hours. Come and see me again in a fortnight, and get this made up. That's all right"—he waved aside James's proffered guineas. "Don't accept fees from naval or military. . . . Least we can do is to mend you quickly. 'Morning. . . ."

James descended the staircase, and passed a tall, lean figure in soiled khaki ascending, whom the public (together with his wife and family)

had every reason to suppose was at that moment in the neighbourhood of Ypres.

"If it weren't for those fellows I couldn't be here," was his greeting to the specialist. He jerked his grey, close-cropped head towards the door through which Thorogood had just passed.

2

A RAMSHACKLE covered cart laden with an assortment of tinware had stopped on the outskirts of the village. The owner, a bent scarecrow of a fellow, was effecting repairs to his nag's harness with a piece of string. Evening was setting in, and the south-east wind swept a grey haze across the coast road and sombre marshes. The tinker completed first-aid to the harness, and stood at the front of the cart to light his lamps. The first match blew out, and he came closer to the body of the vehicle for shelter from the wind.

At that moment a pedestrian passed, humming a little tune to himself, striding along through the November murk with swinging gait. It may have been that his voice, coming suddenly within range of the mare's ears, conveyed a sound of encouragement. Perhaps the lights of the village, twinkling out one by one along the street, suggested stables and a nosebag. Anyhow, the tinker's nag threw her weight suddenly into the collar, the wheel of the cart

passed over the tinker's toe, and the tinker uttered a sudden exclamation.

In the circumstances it was a pardonable enough ebullition of feeling and ought not to have caused the passing pedestrian to spin round on his heel, astonishment on every line of his face. The next moment, however, he recovered himself. "Did you call out to me?" he shouted.

The tinker was nursing his toe, apparently unconscious of having given anyone more food for thought than usual. "No," he replied gruffly. "I 'urt myself."

The passer-by turned and pursued his way to the village. The tinker lit his lamps and followed. He was a retiring sort of tinker, and employed no flamboyant methods to advertise his wares. He jingled through the village without attracting any customers—or apparently desiring to attract any—and followed the sandy coast road for some miles.

At length he pulled up, and from his seat on the off-shaft sat motionless for a minute, listening. The horse, as if realising that its dreams of a warm stable were dreams indeed, hung its head dejectedly, and in the faint gleam of the lamp its breath rose in thin vapour. The man descended from his perch on the shaft and, going to his nag's head, turned the cart off the road.

For some minutes the man and horse

stumbled through the darkness; the cart jolted, and the tin merchandise rattled dolefully. The tinker, true to the traditions of his calling, swore again. Then he found what he had been looking for, an uneven track that wound among the sand-dunes towards the shore. The murmur of the sea became suddenly loud and distinct.

With a jerk the horse and cart came to a standstill. In a leisurely fashion the tinker unharnessed his mare, tied a nosebag on her, and tethered her to the tail of the cart. In the same deliberate manner he rummaged about among his wares till he produced a bundle of sticks and some pieces of turf. With these under his arm, he scrambled off across the sand-hills to the sea.

The incoming tide sobbed and gurgled along miniature headlands of rock that stretched out on either side of a little bay. The sand-hills straggled down almost to high-water mark, where the winter storms had piled a barrier of kelp and debris. At one place a rough track down to the shingle had been worn in the sand by the feet of fishermen using the cove in fine weather during the summer.

The tinker selected a site for his fire in a hollow that opened to the sea. He built a hearth with flat stones, fetched a kettle from the cart, kindled the fire, and busied himself with preparations for his evening meal. This concluded, he laid a fresh turf of peat upon the

embers, banked the sand up all round till the faint glow was invisible a few yards distant, and lit a pipe.

The night wore on. Every now and again the man rose, climbed a sand-hill, and stood listening, returning each time to his vigil by the fire. At length he leaned forward and held the face of his watch near the fire-glow. Apparently the time had come for action of some sort, for he rose and made off into the darkness. When he reappeared he carried a tin pannikin in his hand, and stood motionless by the fire, staring out to sea.

Ten minutes he waited; then, suddenly, he made an inaudible observation. A light appeared out of the darkness beyond the headland, winked twice, and vanished. The tinker approached his fire and swilled something from his pannikin on to the glowing embers. A flame shot up about three feet, and died down, flickering. The tin contained paraffin, and three times the tinker repeated the strange rite. Then he sat down and waited.

A quarter of an hour passed before something grated on the shingle of the beach, scarcely perceptible above the lap of the waves. The tinker rose to his feet, shovelled the sand over the embers of his fire, and descended the little path to the beach. The night was inky dark, and for a moment he paused irresolute. Then a dark form appeared against the faintly

luminous foam, wading knee deep and dragging the bows of a small skiff towards the shore. The tinker gave a low whistle, and the wader paused.

"*Fritz!*" he said guardedly.

"*Ja! Hier!*" replied the tinker, advancing.

"*Gott sei dank!*" said the other. He left the boat and waded ashore. The two men shook hands. "Where's the cart?" asked the low voice in German.

"Among the sand-hills. You will want assistance. Have you more than one with you in the boat?"

"Yes." The new-comer turned and gave a brusque order. Another figure waded ashore and joined the two men, a tall, bearded fellow in duffel overalls. As his feet reached the sand he spat ostentatiously. The tinker led the way to the cart.

"It is dark," said the first man from the sea. "How many cans have you got?"

"Forty-eight. I could get no more without exciting suspicion. They have requisitioned one of my cars as it is."

The other gave a low laugh. "What irony! Well, that will last till Friday. But you must try and get more then. I will be here at the same time; no, the tide will not suit—at 3 a.m. We can come inside then. Did you remember the cigarettes?"

"Yes." The tinker climbed into the cart and handed a petrol tin down to the speaker. "*Ein!*" he said. "Count them," and lifted out another. "*Zwei!*" The third man, who had not hitherto spoken, received them with a grunt, and set off down to the boat with his burden.

Eight times the trio made the journey to and from the beach. Three times they waited while the tiny collapsible boat ferried its cargo out to where, in the darkness, a long, black shadow lay, with the water lapping round it, like a partly submerged whale. The last time the tinker remained alone on the beach.

He stood awhile staring out into the darkness, and at length turned to retrace his steps. As he reached the shelter of the sand-dunes a tall shadow rose out of the ground at his feet, and the next instant he was writhing on his face in the grip of an exceedingly effective neck-and-arm lock.

"If you try to kick, my pippin," said the excited voice of James Thorogood, "I shall simply break your arm—so!"

The face in the sand emitted a muffled squark.

"Keep still, then."

The two men breathed heavily for a minute.

"Don't swear, either. That's what got you into this trouble, that deplorable habit of swearing aloud in German. But I will say, for a

tinker, you put a very neat West Country whipping on that bit of broken harness. I've been admiring it. Didn't know they taught you that in the German navy—*don't* wriggle."

8

James Thorogood, retaining a firm hold on his companion's arm, bent down and gathered a handful of loose earth from a flower-bed at his feet. The moonlight, shining fitfully through flying clouds, illumined the face of the old house and the two road-stained figures standing under its walls. It was a lonely, rambling building, partly sheltered from the prevailing wind by a clump of poplars, and looking out down an avenue bordered by untidy rhododendrons.

"Won't Uncle Bill be pleased!" said James, and flung his handful of earth with relish against one of the window-panes on the first floor. He and his captive waited in silence for some minutes; then he repeated the assault. Soon a light wavered behind the curtains, the sash lifted, and a head and shoulders appeared.

"Hallo!" said a man's voice.

"Uncle Bill!" called James. There was a moment's silence.

"Well?" said the voice again, patiently.

"Uncle Bill! It's me—Jim. Will you come down and open the door? And don't wake Janet, whatever you do." Janet was the housekeeper, stone deaf these fifteen years.

The head and shoulders disappeared. Again the light flickered, grew dim, and vanished. "This way," said James, and led his companion round an angle of the house into the shadow of the square Georgian porch. The bolts were being withdrawn as they reached the steps, and a tall, grey-haired man in a dressing-gown opened the door. He held a candle above his head and surveyed the wayfarers through a rimless monocle.

"Didn't expect you till to-morrow," was his laconic greeting. "Brought a friend?"

"He's not a friend exactly," said James, pushing his companion in through the door, and examining him curiously by the light of the candle. "But I'll tell you all about him later on. His name's Fritz. D'you mind if I lock him in the cellar?"

"Do," replied Uncle Bill dryly. He produced a bunch of keys from the pocket of his dressing-gown. "It's the thin brass key. There's some quite decent brandy in the farthest bin on the right-hand side, if you're thinking of making a night of it down there. Take the candle; I'm going back to bed."

"Don't go to bed," called James from the head of the stairs. "I want to have a yarn with you in a minute. Light the gas in the dining-room."

Five minutes later he reappeared carrying a tray with cold beef, bread, and a jug of beer

upon it. Uncle Bill stood in front of the dead ashes of his hearth considering his nephew through his eyeglass. "I hope you made—er—Fritz comfortable? You look as if you had been doing a forced march. Nerves better?"

James set down his empty glass with a sigh and wiped his mouth. "As comfortable as he deserves to me. He's a spy, Uncle Bill. I caught him supplying petrol to a German submarine."

"Really?" said Uncle Bill, without enthusiasm. "That brandy cost me 180s. a dozen. Wouldn't he be better in a police station? Have you informed the Admiralty?"

"I venerate the police," replied James flippantly, "and the Admiralty are as a father and mother to me; but I want to keep this absolutely quiet for a few days—anyhow, till after Friday. I couldn't turn Fritz over to a policeman without attracting a certain amount of attention. Anyhow, it would leak out if I did. I've walked eighteen miles already since midnight, and it's another fifty-nine to the Admiralty from here. Besides, unless I disguise Fritz as a performing bear, people would want to know why I was leading him about on a rope's end——"

"Start at the beginning," interrupted Uncle Bill wearily, "and explain, avoiding all unnecessary detail."

So James, between mouthfuls, gave a brief

résumé of the night's adventure, while Sir William Thorogood, Professor of Chemistry and Adviser to the Admiralty on Submarine Explosives, stood and shivered on the hearthrug.

"And it just shows," concluded his nephew, "what a three-hours' swim in the North Sea does for a chap's morals." He eyed his Uncle Bill solemnly. "I even chucked the fellow's seamanship in his teeth!"

Sir William polished his eyeglass with a silk handkerchief and replaced it with care.

"*Did* you!" he said.

4

A SQUAT tub of a boat, her stern piled high with wicker crab-pots, came round the northern headland and entered the little bay. The elderly fisherman who was rowing rested on his oars and sat contemplating the crab-pots in the stern. A younger man, clad in a jersey and sea boots, was busy coiling down something in the bows. "How about this spot," he said presently, looking up over his shoulder, "for the first one?" The rower fumbled about inside his tattered jacket, produced something that glistened in the sunlight, and screwed it into his eye.

"Uncle Bill!" protested the younger fisherman, "do unship that thing. If there *is* anyone watching us, it will give the whole show away."

Sir William Thorogood surveyed the harbour with an expressionless countenance. "I consider that having donned these unsavoury garments—did Janet bake them thoroughly, by the way?—I have already forfeited my self-respect quite sufficiently. How much of the circuit have you got off the drum?"

"Six fathoms."

"That's enough for the first, then." The speaker rose, lifted a crab-pot with an effort, and tipped it over the side of the boat. The cable whizzed out over the gunwale for a few seconds and stopped. Uncle Bill resumed paddling for a little distance, and repeated the manœuvre eight times in a semi-circle round the inside of the bay, across the entrance. "That's enough," he observed at length, as the last crab-pot sank with a splash. "Don't want to break all their windows ashore. These will do all they're intended to." He propelled the boat towards the shore, while James paid out the weighted cable. The bows of the boat grated on the shingle, and the elder man climbed out. "Hand me the battery and the firing key—in that box under the thwart there. Now bring the end of the cable along."

As they toiled up the shifting flank of a sand-dune, James indicated a charred spot in the sand. "That's where he showed the flare, Uncle Bill."

Uncle Bill nodded disinterestedly. Side by

side they topped the tufted crest of the dune and vanished among the sand-hills.

* * * * *

Somewhere across the marshes a church clock was striking midnight when a big covered car pulled up at the roadside in the spot where, a few nights before, the tinker's cart had turned off among the sand-hills. The driver switched the engine off and extinguished the lights. Two men emerged from the body of the car; one, a short, thick-set figure muffled in a Naval overcoat, stamped up and down to restore his circulation. "Is this the place?" he asked.

"Part of it," replied the voice of Uncle Bill from the driving seat. "My nephew will show you the rest. I shall stay here, if Jim doesn't mind handing me the Thermos flask and my cigar-case—thanks."

James walked round the rear of the car and began groping about in the dry ditch at the roadside.

"Don't say you can't find it, Jim," said Sir William. He bent forward to light his cigar, and the flare of the match shone on his dress shirt-front and immaculate white tie. He refastened his motoring coat, and leaned back puffing serenely.

"Got it!" said a voice from the ditch, and James reappeared, carrying a small box and trailing something behind him. He held it out

to the short man with gold oak leaves round his cap-peak. His hand trembled slightly.

"Here's the firing key, sir!"

"Oh, thanks. Let's put it in the stern-sheets of the car till I come back. I'd like to have a look at the spot."

"You'll get your boots full of sand," said Uncle Bill's voice under the hood.

James lifted a small sack and an oil-can out of the motor, and the two figures vanished side by side into the night.

Half an hour later the elder man reappeared. "He's going to blow a whistle," he observed, and climbed into the body of the car, where Sir William was now sitting under a pile of rugs. He made room for the new-comer.

"Have some rug . . . and here's the foot-warmer. . . . I see. And then you—er—do the rest? The box is on the seat beside you."

The other settled down into his seat and tucked the rug round himself. "Thanks," was the grim reply. "Yes, I'll do the rest!" He lit a pipe, and smoked in silence, as if following a train of thought. "My boy would have been sixteen to-morrow. . . ."

"Ah!" said Uncle Bill.

An hour passed. The Naval man refilled and lit another pipe. By the light of the match he examined his watch. "I suppose you tested the contacts?" he asked at length in a low voice.

"Yes," was the reply, and they lapsed into

silence again. The other shifted his position slightly and raised his head, staring into the darkness beyond the road whence came the faint, continuous murmur of the sea.

Seaward a faint gleam of light threw into relief for an instant the dark outline of a sand-dune, and sank into obscurity again.

Uncle Bill's eyeglass dropped against the buttons of his coat with a tinkle. The grim, silent man beside him lifted something on to his knees, and there was a faint click like the safety-catch of a gun being released.

A frog in the ditch near by set up a low, meditative croaking. Uncle Bill raised his head abruptly. Their straining ears caught the sound of someone running, stumbling along the uneven track that wound in from the shore. A whistle cut the stillness like a knife.

There was a hoarse rumble seaward that broke into a deafening roar, and was succeeded by a sound like the bursting of a dam. The car rocked with the concussion, and the fragments of the shattered wind-screen tinkled down over the bonnet and footboard.

Then utter, absolute silence.

II

THE DRUM

1

Ole Jarge put down the baler and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. A few fish scales transferred themselves from the back of his oakum-coloured hand to his venerable brow.

"'Tain't no use," he murmured. "'Er's nigh twenty year' ole—come nex' month. Tar ain't no use neither. 'Tis new strakes 'ers wantin'." He thumbed the seams of the old boat that lay on the shingle, with the outgoing tide still lapping round her stern. "An' new strakes do cost tarrible lot." He sat puffing his clay pipe and transferred his gaze from the bottom of the boat to the whitewashed cottages huddled under the lee of the cliffs. A tall figure was moving about the nets that festooned the low wall in front of the cottages.

Ole Jarge removed his pipe from his mouth, substituted two fingers of his right hand, and gave a long, shrill whistle. It was a disconcerting performance. For one thing, you associated the trick with irrepressible boyhood, and, for

another, the old man squinted slightly as he did it. As a matter of fact, he had learned it on the Dogger Bank fifty years before; fog-bound in a dory, it was a useful accomplishment.

Young Jarge straightened up, raised one hand in acknowledgment of the summons, and came crunching slowly across the shingle towards the boat. Ole Jarge sat smoking in philosophical silence till his son was beside him. Then he removed his pipe and spat over the listed gunwale.

"'Er's daid," he observed laconically.

Young Jarge bent stiffly and tapped the seams, inside and out, much as a veterinary surgeon runs his hand over a horse's legs.

"Ya-a-is," he confirmed, and sat down on the stem of the old boat. "'Er's very nigh's ole 's what us be," he added, after a pause, and began shredding some tobacco into the palm of his hand.

Ole Jarge nodded. Then he lifted his head quickly. "'Er's bound to last 'nother year." For the first time there was concern in his voice. Adversity does not grip the mind of the Cornish fisherfolk suddenly. It filters slowly through the chinks of the armour God has given them. Cornish men (and surely Cornish maids) were kind to the survivors of the wrecked Armada. It may be that they, in their turn, bequeathed a strain of Southern fatalism to many of their benefactors.

" 'Er's bound to," repeated Ole Jarge. He got ponderously out of the boat and removed a tattered sou'wester to scratch his head with his thumbnail—another trick that had survived the adventurous days of the Dogger Bank.

The unfamiliar note of anxiety in his father's voice stirred Young Jarge. He rose to his feet with perplexity in his dark eyes, mechanically pulling up the bleached leather thigh-boots he wore afloat and ashore, " rainy-come-fine."

Inspiration had come, as it does to men of the West once the need is realised to the full.

" Du 'ee mind that there li'l' ole copper boiler—what come out o' granfer's house when 'er blawed down—back tu '98?" asked Young Jarge slowly.

Ole Jarge nodded.

" S'pose us was to hammer 'n out flat like an' nail un down to bottom, 'long wi' oakum an' drop o' white lead—what du 'ee say?"

Ole Jarge silently measured the area of the sprunk strakes with the stumpy thumb and little finger of an outstretched hand. Then he puckered his forehead and stared out to sea, apparently making mental calculations connected with the " li'l' ole copper boiler."

" Ya-a-ais." He replaced the piece of perished tarpaulin that had once been a sou'-wester on his head, and set off slowly across the shingle towards the village. Young Jarge followed, staring at his boots as he walked.

"Us 'll hammer 'n out after tea," said Ole Jarge over his shoulder. His great, great, very great grandfather would have said "*Mañana!*"

* * * * *

The setting sun had tipped the dancing wavelets with fire and was glowing red in each pool left by the receding tide when Ole Jarge emerged from his cottage door. In one hand he carried a hammer, and in the other a tin of white lead. Young Jarge joined him with a small, square copper boiler in his arms.

"Where'll us put un tu, feyther?"

Ole Jarge set off across the beach in the direction of the boat. "Bring un along!" he commanded in a manner dimly suggestive of a lord high executioner.

Young Jarge followed, and dumped his burden down alongside the boat.

"Now!" said Ole Jarge grimly. He spat on his hands and prepared to enjoy himself. Bang! bang! bang-a-bang! bang! went the hammer. Young Jarge sat down in the gunwale of the boat and contemplated his parent's exertions.

"It du put Oi in mind of a drum," he said appreciatively.

2

"Now we can talk!" Margaret settled her back comfortably against a ridge of turf and closed her eyes for a moment.

"Isn't it heavenly up here? The wind smells of seaweed, and there must be some shrub or flower——" She opened her eyes and looked along the cliffs. "There's something smelling divinely. Wild broom, is it?"

Her gaze travelled along the succession of ragged headlands and crescents of sand formed by each little bay of the indented coast. The coastguard track, a brown thread winding adventurously among the clumps of gorse at the very edge of the cliffs, drew her eyes farther and farther to the west. In the far distance the track dipped sharply over a headland where the whitewashed coastguard station stood, and was lost to view. She turned and smiled at her companion. "Now we can talk," she repeated.

Torps, sitting beside her, met her eyes with his grave, gentle smile. "I'm so glad to see you again," he said, "that I can't think of anything else to say. It was nice of you to write and tell me you were here."

As if by common consent, they had discussed nothing but generalities during the half-hour's walk that brought them to this sheltered hollow in the cliffs. The woman was, of the two, the more reluctant to bridge the years that lay between to-day and their last meeting. Yet, womanlike, it was she that spoke first.

"I knew your ship was quite close. I wanted to see you again, Trevor, after all these

years. Tell me about yourself. Your letters —yes, I know; but you never talked much about yourself in your letters."

He shook his head quietly. "No, you tell first."

"There isn't much to tell." She interlaced her fingers round her updrawn knees. Her grey eyes were turned to the sea, and Torps watched her profile against the sky wistfully, studying the pure brow, the threads of silver appearing here and there in her soft brown hair, the strong, almost boyish lines of mouth and chin. *En profile*, thus, she looked very like a handsome boy.

"I've been teaching at one of those training institutes for girls on the East Coast. The principal, Miss Dacre is her name"—Margaret paused as if expecting some comment from her companion: none came—"Pauline Dacre; she was at school with mother: they were great friends; and when mother died she offered me a home. . . . I had a little money—enough to go through a course of training. I learned things——"

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, cooking and laundry, and hygiene—domestic science it's called." Torps nodded. "And then, when I knew enough to teach others, I went to—to this place; I've been there ever since. And that's all. Now it's your turn."

Torps studied the traces of overwork and strain which showed in the faintly accentuated cheekbones and which painted little tired shadows about her eyelids.

"No, it's not all. Why have you come down here?"

"I—I——" She coloured as if accused. "I got a little run down . . . that was all. But I've saved some money; I can afford a rest. I'm what is called 'an independent gentlewoman of leisure' for a while." She laughed, a gay little laugh.

"Do you mean you are going back there again?"

She looked at him with frank surprise. "Of course I am, silly!"

"Don't go back . . . not to that life again. How can you? Shut up in a sort of convent. . . . You can't be a school-marm all your life; you were meant for other things. . . . I suppose you have to sleep on a hard bed, and get up in the dark when a bell rings. There aren't any carpets, and they don't give you enough to eat, as likely as not. Margaret, why should you? It's the sort of work anyone can do—teaching kids to mangle."

"But . . . what do you think I am going to do with the remainder of my days—crochet? embroider slippers for the curate? Trevor, you wouldn't like me to come to that in my old age, would you?" She spoke with gentle banter, as

if to fend off something she feared. Had Torps known it, she was fencing for the happiness of them both.

He shook his head gravely.

"I hoped—because you had written to me—that you weren't going back. . . ." His thin, strong hand closed over hers, resting on the turf between them. He bent his head as if considering their fingers. "Margaret, dear——"

"Ah, Trevor, don't—please don't. . . . Not again. I thought all that was dead and buried years ago. And do you really think"—she smiled a little sadly—"if I—if things were different—that I should have written to ask you to meet me to-day? Have you learned so little of women in all these years?" There was something besides sadness in her eyes now: a wistful, half-maternal tenderness. He raised his head.

"I've learned nothing about women, Margaret, but what I learned from you."

She gently withdrew her hand. "Trevor, we're not children any longer. We're older and wiser. We——"

"We're older—yes. But I don't see what that has to do with it, except that my need is greater. . . . I'm a little lonelier. There's never been anyone but you. I've never looked across the road at a woman in my life—except you. I know we're not children, and for that

reason we ought to know our own minds. Do you know yours, Margaret?"

Margaret bowed her head, collecting her thoughts and setting them in order, before she answered:

"It isn't easy to say what I have to say. You must be patient—generous, as you can be, Trevor, of all the men I know." She hesitated and coloured again a little. "You say you want me. If there were no one else who I thought had a greater claim, you should—no, hush! listen, dear—I would give you—what you want . . . gladly—oh, gladly! But the children need me—my influence. . . . Miss Dacre said it is doing the highest service one could for the Empire . . . theirs is the higher claim. Can you understand? Oh, *can* you?"

Torps made no reply, staring out to sea with sombre eyes.

Gaining confidence with his silence, she continued the shy unfolding of her ideals. "Nothing is too good for boys; no training is high enough, because they are to be the builders and upholders of our Empire. Don't you think that little girls, who are destined some day to be the mates of these boys, should be prepared in a way that will make them worthy of their share of the inheritance? They have to be taught ideals of honour and courage and intelligent patriotism, so that they can help and

encourage their men in years to come. They must learn to cook and sew, learn the laws of Nature and hygiene, so that they can make the home not 'an habitation enforced'—as it is for so many women—but a place where they may with all honour bring into the world other little girls and boys. . . ." She drew her breath quickly. "Ah, that is not a thing anyone can do, teaching all that! It must be someone who gives all—and who gives herself gladly . . . as I have."

Torps turned his head as if to speak, but checked himself.

"Don't think I am setting myself upon a pedestal. Don't think my heart is too anæmic to—to care for you, and that I am trying to shelter myself behind talk of a life's mission. Oh!" she cried, "be generous. Don't try to make it harder."

She leaned towards him a little as he sat with lowered eyes. "This is a time of grave anxiety, isn't it?" she continued gently, as if explaining something to an impatient child. "You naval men ought to know. There is talk of war everywhere—of war with Germany. They say we are on the brink of it to-day." Torps nodded. "Supposing it came now . . . and you were recalled. How do they recall you? Sound a bugle—beat a drum?"

Torps smiled faintly. "Something of the sort—no, not a drum; a bugle, perhaps."

"Well, we'll suppose it is a drum. One somehow associates it with war and alarms. Would you hesitate to obey?" Torps refrained from the obvious answer and plucked a grass-stem to put between his teeth. "You would obey, wouldn't you, because it is your duty —however much you'd like to sit here with me? Will you try to realise that I shall be only answering the drum, too, when—I go back."

The breeze that strayed about the floor of the Channel fanned their faces and set the bright sea-poppies nodding all along the edge of the cliffs. The sun was low in the west, and a snake-like flotilla of destroyers crept out across the quiet sea from the harbour hidden by a fold in the hills. Torps watched them with absent eyes, and there was a long silence. The wind had loosened a strand of his companion's hair, and she was busy replacing it with deft fingers.

"Margaret," he replied at last, "you said just now that I understood very little about women. I think you are right. Perhaps if I understood more I might know how to muffle the drum so that you wouldn't hear it. I might have learned to pipe a tune that would make you not want to hear it. . . . I don't know. . . . But I accept all you say—although deep down in my heart I know you are wrong. There will come a day when you, too, will know you are

wrong. I shall come back then. And till then, since I must"—he smiled in a whimsical, sad way that somehow relaxed the tension—"I lend you to the children."

She returned his smile quite naturally, with relief in her eyes. "Dear Trevor, yes . . . because they need me so. . . . Believe me, I am not wrong: and we keep our friendship still, sweet and sane——" She broke off suddenly and raised a slim forefinger, holding her head sideways to listen, the way women and birds and children seem to hear better. "Hark! Did you hear? How odd! Listen, Trevor!"

Torps brought himself back with an effort. "Hear what?"

"Listen!"

He listened.

"I can hear the waves along the shingle."

"No, no. . . . There—now!"

"Oh! . . . Yes, I can hear. . . . It sounds like a drum."

"Trevor, it *is* a drum, somewhere out at sea! How odd when we were just talking about drums—hush! Oh, do listen. . . ."

The sound, borne to them on the light wind, seemed to grow nearer; then it waned till they could scarcely catch the beats. Anon it swelled louder: the unmistakable "Dub! dub! rub-a-dub! dub! . . . Dub! dub! dub!" of a far-off drum.

Margaret shook his sleeve. "Of course it's a drum. It can't be anything else, can it?"

"It's Drake's Drum!" he replied, with mock solemnity. "There's a legend in the West Country, you know——"

"I know!" She nodded, bright eyed with interest, and rose to a kneeling position to gaze beneath her palms out towards the west. The sun had set, and a thin grey haze slowly veiled the horizon. Already the warm afterglow was dying out of the sky.

"He has 'quit the Port of Heaven,'" she quoted half-seriously, playing with superstition as only women can, "and he's 'drumming up the Channel'! They say it foretells war . . . that noise. . . ." Margaret gave a little shiver and rose to her graceful height, extending both her ringless hands to him. "It's getting chilly —come!"

Torps rose to his feet, too, and for a moment faced her, with his grave, patient eyes on hers. For the first time she noticed that his hair was going grey about the temples, and, had he known it, Margaret came very near to wavering in that moment. Perhaps he did realise, and with quick, characteristic generosity helped her.

"I think I understand," he said, "something of their need—the need of the children for such as you. It—it——" He turned abruptly towards the sea. The noise that resembled a distant drum had ceased, and there

was only the faint surge of the waves on the beaches far below.

It was the only sound in all the land and sea.

* * * * *

In the whitewashed coastguard station a mile away the bearded occupant on duty was finishing his tea. The skeleton of a herring lay on the side of his plate, the centre of which the boatman was scouring with a piece of bread (preparatory to occupying it with damson jam), when the telephone bell rang. A man of economical habits, he put the bread in his mouth, and, rising from the table, picked up the receiver.

"... *Portree Signal Station—Yes.*"

"... *'Oo? Yes.*"

He stood motionless with the receiver to his ear, his jaws moving mechanically about the last of the piece of bread. Outside the little room the wind thrummed in the halliards of the signal-mast. The clock over the desk ticked out the deliberate seconds. A cat, curled up by the window, rose, stretching itself, and yawned.

"... *Prepare to mobilise. All officers and men are recalled from leave. Detailed orders will follow. Right. Good-bye.*"

He replaced the receiver and rang off. Then, still masticating, he executed a species of solemn war-dance in the middle of the floor.

"Crikey!" he said aloud. "That means war, that do! Bloody war!"

He snatched up a telescope and ran outside, still talking aloud to himself after the manner of men who live much alone. "I see a bloke an' 'is young woman along there this afternoon. I'd ha' said he was a naval orficer if anyone was to ask me." He scanned the hills through his glass for a moment, and then set off along the track that skirted the edge of the cliffs.

Margaret saw him first, a broad, blue-clad figure, threading his way among the furze bushes. "And you won't be unhappy, will you, Trevor?" she was saying. "You will understand, you——" She broke off to watch the coastguard hurrying towards them. "Does that sailor want to speak to us, do you think? He seems in a great hurry."

Torps stood at her side staring.

The coastguard drew near, wiping his face with a vast blue and white spotted handkerchief, for he had been running. "Beg pardon, sir," he called as he came within earshot, "but would you be a naval officer?"

"I am," replied Torps. "Why?"

The man saluted. "There's a telephone message just come through, sir, 'Prepare to mobilise. All officers and men are recalled from leave.'"

Torps stared at him. "Where did it come from—the message?"

"From the port, sir. I was to warn anyone I saw out this way . . ."

"Right; thank you. I'm going back now." He turned towards Margaret. "Did you hear that?" There was a queer note of relief in his voice.

"Yes," she replied quietly. "The Drum."

III

A CAPTAIN'S FORENOON

THE Captain came out of his sleeping-cabin as the last chord of the National Anthem died away on the quarter-deck overhead with the roll of kettledrums.

"Carry on!" sang the bugle; and the ship's company, their animation suspended while the colours crept up the jackstaff, proceeded to "breakfast and clean." The signalman whose duty it was to hoist the Ensign at 8 a.m. turned up the halliards to his satisfaction, and departed forward in the wake of the band.

The Captain had "cleaned" already, and his breakfast was on the table in his fore-cabin. He sat down, glanced at the pile of letters beside his plate, propped the morning paper against the teapot, and commenced his meal. He ate with the deliberate slowness of a man accustomed to having meals in solitude, who has schooled himself not to abuse his digestion.

As he ate his quick eye travelled over the headlines of the paper, occasionally concentrating on a paragraph here and there. Ten minutes sufficed to give him a complete grasp

of the day's affairs. The naval appointments he read carefully. His memory for names and individuals was unfailing; he never forgot anyone who had served under his command, and followed the careers of most with interest. His daily private correspondence, which was large, testified to the fact that not many forgot him.

Breakfast over, he laid aside the paper, lit a cigarette, and turned over the little pile of letters, identifying the writers with a glance at the handwriting on each envelope. Only one was unknown to him: that he placed last, and carried them into the after-cabin to read, leaning his shoulder against the mantel of the tiled and brass-bound fireplace.

The first letter he opened was from his wife, and, in consequence, its contents were nobody's affair but his own. He read it twice, and smiled as he returned it to the envelope.

The next, written on thick notepaper stamped with the Admiralty crest, he also read twice, and mused awhile. Apparently this also was nobody's concern but his, for, still deep in thought, he tore it up and put the pieces in the fire before taking up the third. This was an appeal for assistance from a former watch-keeper who aspired to the Flying Corps. The next was also a request for assistance from a young officer, who, having recently taken a wife to his bosom, apparently considered the

achievement a qualification for the command of one of H.M. torpedo-boat destroyers.

The Captain rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I sent him a silver photograph frame. . . . He'll want me to be godfather next." He occasionally spoke aloud when alone.

An appeal for funds for a memorial to someone or another followed. Then two advertisements from wine merchants and a statement of his account with his outfitter were consigned in turns into the fire. The last envelope, in the unknown hand, he scrutinised for a moment before opening. The postmark was local, the caligraphy illiterate. He opened the letter and read it with an inscrutable face. Then, with a quick movement as of disgust, he crumpled it up and threw it into the flames. It was anonymous, and was a threat, couched in lurid and ensanguined terms, to murder him.

Judges, and post-captains of the Royal Navy, perhaps as a reminder of their great responsibilities, occasionally receive communications of this nature. Their life insurance policies, however, appear to remain much the same as those of other people.

* * * * *

The after-cabin, where the Captain perused his correspondence, was an airy, chintz-upholstered apartment leading aft through two heavy steel doors on to the stern-walk. The doors

were open on that particular morning, and the high, thin cries of seagulls quarrelling under the stern drifted through almost unceasingly.

Forward, the white-enamelled bulkhead was pierced by two entrances. One led from a diminutive sleeping-cabin and bathroom, the other from the fore-cabin, which the Captain had just quitted, and which in turn communicated with a lobby where a marine sentry paced day and night.

The after-cabin was lit by a skylight overhead and scuttles in the ship's side. The sunlight, streaming in through the starboard ones, winked on the butterfly clamps of burnished brass and small rods from which the little chintz curtains hung. A roll-topped desk occupied a corner near the fireplace, and round the bulkheads, affixed to white enamelled battens, hung water-colour paintings of his ships. A sloop of war under full sail; a brig, close-hauled, beating out of Plymouth Sound; a tiny gunboat at anchor in a backwater of the Upper Yangtse. There were spick-and-span cruisers; a quaint, top-heavy-looking battleship that in her day had been considered the last word in naval construction, and whose name to-day provokes reminiscences from the older generation and from the younger half-dubious smiles; then, near the door, came modern men-of-war of familiar aspect. They represented the milestones of a long career.

A chart lay folded on a table in the centre of the cabin, with a pair of dividers and a parallel ruler lying on it. Another table stood in a corner near the door—a small, glass-topped table such as collectors of curios gather their treasures in. The contents of this table, however, were not curios in the strict sense of the word. A number of them were very commonplace objects, but each one held its particular associations.

You will find just such a collection of insignificant mysteries in a boy's pocket or a jackdaw's nest. Bits of string, a marble polished by friction, a piece of coloured glass, an old nail—in themselves rubbish, but doubtless linking the possessor to some amiable memory, and cherished for no better reason.

Some men retain this instinct of boyhood. But whereas the boy is secretive and reticent about the particular associations his pocket holds, the man will talk about his hoard.

In the glass-topped table in that corner of the after-cabin were ties with all the seven seas and the shores they wash. Mementoes of folly or friendship, sport or achievement; fragments of the mosaic that is life.

A bit of brick from the Great Wall of China recalled a bag of geese in the clear cold dusk of Northern Asia. Memories, too, of the whaler's beat back to the fleet in the teeth of a rising gale that swept in from the Pacific, when the

bravest unlaced his boots and they baled with the empty guncase.

There was a piece of the sacred pavement of Mecca, brought back in the days when few Europeans had brought anything back from there—even their lives. A gold medal in a morocco-leather case, won by an essay that had called for months of unrelaxed study. A copper bangle from the wrist of a Korean dancing-girl (it was somebody else's story, though). A wooden ju-ju from Benin, dark-stained and repulsive; a tiny clay godling that had guarded the mummied heart of an Egyptian queen. A flint arrow-head picked up on Dartmoor during a long summer tramp after the speckled trout. A jewelled cigarette-case, gift of an empress who could give no more than that, however much she may have wanted to.

Rubbish, all rubbish. Yet occasionally, when two or three post-captains, contemporaries and fleet-mates, gathered here to smoke after-dinner cigars, the host would unlock the glass-topped table, select some object from his miscellany, and hold it up with a "D'you remember——?" And one or other of his guests—sometimes all of them—would laugh and nod and blow great clouds of smoke and slide into eager reminiscence. Yesterday is the play-ground of all men's hearts, but more especially those of sailor men. These odds and ends were only keys that unlocked the gate.

A Tall Ship

A few photographs stood on the shelf above the hearth. Some books occupied a revolving bookcase within reach of anyone sitting at the desk; not very interesting books: old Navy Lists, a "King's Regulations," a "Manual of Court Martial Procedure," one or two volumes on International Law, and a treatise on so-called 'modern' seamanship—which, by the way, is a misnomer, seamanship, like love, being of all time.

The revolving bookcase supported a bowl of flowers. The Captain's Coxswain had personally arranged them that morning; had, in fact, had a slight difference of opinion with the Captain's valet (conducted *sotto voce*) over the method of their arrangement. The Coxswain won on the claim of being a married man and understanding mysteries beyond the ken of bachelors. The result in either case would have brought tears to the eyes of any woman.

* * * * *

The Captain finished his cigarette and opened the roll-topped desk, slipped his letters into a pigeon-hole, and closed the desk again. As he did so the Commander entered the cabin, tucking his cap under his arm.

"Nine o'clock, sir; all ready for divisions. The Chaplain is sick—will you read prayers?"

"Sick, is he? What's the matter?"

"He twisted his knee yesterday playing football. The Fleet Surgeon has made him lie up."

The Captain nodded. "All right; I'll read them." As the Commander turned to go he spoke again: "By the way, that fellow I gave ninety days to yesterday—was there a woman in the case, d'you happen to know? There was nothing in the evidence, of course, but I wondered——"

The Commander paused while the busy brain searched among its dockets. The man whose business it is as Executive Officer to control the affairs of close on a thousand of his fellow men must of necessity sometimes learn curiously intimate details of their lives.

"Yes; the Master-at-Arms mentioned to me that a woman was at the bottom of it. She's a wrong 'un, I understand."

"Thank you."

The Commander went out, and a moment later the bugle overhead blazed forth "Divisions."

"I thought it was a woman's writing," added the Captain musingly.

"Divisions correct, sir!" The Commander saluted and made his report.

The Captain returned the salute briskly. "Sound the 'Close.'"

The bugle sounded again, the bell began to toll for prayers, and the band on the after shelter-deck struck up a lively march as the men came aft.

Anyone interested in the study called

physiognomy might with advantage have taken his stand at this moment on the after part of the quarter-deck, where the shadow of the White Ensign curved and flickered across the planking. Perhaps the Captain, who stood there, was himself a student of the art. At any rate, as the men marched aft through the screen doors his level eyes passed from face to face, reflective, observant, intensely alert.

The last division reached its allotted position on the quarter-deck, turned inboard, and stood easy. The band stopped abruptly. The bell ceased tolling. In the brief ensuing silence the Commander's voice was clearly audible as he made his report.

"Everybody aft, sir."

The Captain slipped a small prayer-book out of a side pocket. The Commander gave a curt order, and five hundred heads bared to the sunlight.

"Stand easy!"

There is much beauty in the sonorous periods of the English Rubric. Read in the strong, clear voice of a man who for thirty years had known calm and tempest, sunset and dawn at sea, the familiar words—of appeal and praise alike—assumed somehow an unwonted significance; and when he closed the book, slipped it back into his pocket, and looked up, the face he raised was the face of one who, whatever else his creed had taught him, found in all

success the answer to some prayer, in every disaster a call to courage and high endeavour.

* * * * *

Down in the after-cabin, five minutes later, the Fleet Surgeon handed the sick-list to the Captain, who read it with care. For the first time that day his brow clouded. The two men looked at one another.

"It is heavy," said the Fleet Surgeon; "but——" He made an imperceptible upward movement of the shoulders, for his mother had been French.

For some moments after he had gone the Captain stood staring out through the after doorway. A barge, heavily freighted, was passing slowly down-stream. His eyes followed the brown sail absently as long as it was within his field of vision. The anger had gone from his brow and left a shadow of sadness.

"'*Si j'étais Dieu*,'" he murmured, following some train of thought and musing aloud as was his habit. Then, still in a brown study, he opened the roll-topped desk and pressed a bell.

"Tell Mr. Gerrard I'll sign papers," he said to the marine sentry who appeared in the doorway.

"Double-O" Gerrard (so called because he wore glasses with circular lenses and his name made you think of telephones) answered the summons, carrying a sheaf of papers. He was the Captain's Clerk: that is to say, the junior

accountant officer, detailed by the Captain to conduct his official correspondence and perform secretarial work generally. The position is not one commonly sought after, but Double-O Gerrard appeared to enjoy his duties, and as a badge of office carried a perpetual inkstain on the forefinger-tip of his right hand.

The Captain sat down at his desk with a little sigh. If the truth be known, he had small relish for this business of "papers." He picked up his pen and examined the nib.

"Do you ever use your pen to clean a pipe out?" he asked his Clerk.

"Oh no, sir."

"I suppose it depends on the nib one uses whether it suffers much." With a piece of blotting paper the Captain removed fragments of tobacco ash and nicotine from the nib, and dipped it in the ink. "It doesn't seem to hurt mine. Now then, what have we got here?"

A quarter of an hour later he pushed aside the last of the pile of documents and lit a cigarette with the air of a man who had earned a smoke.

"Any defaulters?"

"No, sir, none for you to-day."

"Humph! Tell the Commander I'll buy him a pair of white kid gloves when I go ashore. Request-men?"

His Clerk placed a book upon the desk open

at a list of names. The Captain ran down them with a pencil.

"Badges, all entitled? . . . Stop allotment —who does he allot to? Mother? . . . Restoration to first class for leave. . . . To be rated Leading Seaman—Jones. Jones? Oh, yes, I know: youngster in the quarter-deck division with a broken nose. The Commander spoke to me about him." The pencil slowly descended to the bottom of the page, ticking off each man's request as it was gone into and explained. He stopped at the last one. "'To see Captain about private affairs.' What's his trouble?"

"I don't know, sir. He put in his request to see you through the Master-at-Arms. He didn't say what it was about."

The Captain closed the book. "All seamen, eh? No Marine request-men?"

"No, sir."

"Right. I'll see 'em at eleven." The Clerk gathered the papers together and departed. As he went out there was a tap at the door. The Captain frowned. The tap was repeated.

"Don't knock," he called out. "If you've got anything to report, come in and report it."

The Chief Yeoman of Signals entered with an embarrassed air. He was new to the ship, and, as everyone knows, all captains have their little peculiarities. Here he was up against one right away. He'd never had much luck.

"I don't want anyone to knock when they

come into my cabin on duty. I'm not a young woman in her boudoir."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the Chief Yeoman. "Signal log, sir."

* * * * *

"Don't forget now," counselled the Master-at-Arms to the request-men fallen in on the starboard side of the quarter-deck. "When your names is called out, step smartly up to the table, an' keep your caps on. You salutes when you steps up to the table an' when you leaves it."

The request-men, who had heard all this a good many times before, sucked their teeth in acquiescence.

The Captain was walking up and down the other side of the deck talking to the Commander. They turned together and came towards the table. The Captain's Clerk opened the request-book and laid it before the Captain.

"'Erbert Reynolds," intoned the Master-at-Arms in a stentorian voice. "Able seaman. Requests award of first Good Conduct Badge."

The Captain put his finger on the first name at the top of the page, glanced keenly at the applicant, and nodded. "Granted."

"Granted," echoed the Chief of Police, and Able Seaman Reynolds departed with authority to wear on his left arm the triangular red badge that vouched to his exemplary behaviour for the last three years.

Five others followed in quick succession with similar requests, and trotted forward again at a dignified and amiable gait through the screen door.

"To stop allotment." The Captain raised his head.

"Who do you allot to?"

"Me mother, sir."

"Doesn't she want it?"

The request-man was a young stoker, little more than a boy, and his eyes were troubled.

"She don't deserve it," he replied; "she drinks, sir. I got letters from fr'en's——" He thrust his hand inside the breast of his jumper and produced his sad evidence—a letter from a clergyman, one or two from lay-workers in some north-country slum, and one from his mother herself, an incoherent, abusive scrawl, with liquor stains still upon the creased paper.

"I send 'er my 'arf-pay reg'lar ever since I were in the Navy, sir. But she ain't goin' ter 'ave no more." He made the statement without heat or sorrow.

"Stopped," said the Captain, with a nod.

"Allotment stopped," repeated the Master-at-Arms, and the allotter passed forward out of sight to whatever destiny awaited him.

"To be rated Leading Seaman, sir."

A tall, young Able Seaman stepped forward and fixed eyes of a clear blue on the Captain's face.

The Captain met his gaze, and for a moment threw all the weight of thirty years' experience of men into the scales of judgment. "There is a vacancy for a Leading Seaman's rate in the ship," he said. "The Commander has recommended you for it. You're young. Keep it."

"Rated Leading Seaman. 'Bout turn."

The newly created Leading Seaman, whose nose was a reminder of the vagaries of the main sheet block of a cutter when going about, flushed with pleasure and turned smartly on his heel. The vacant rate was due to a lapse from rectitude on the part of one Biggers, leading hand of the quarter-deck, who had returned from leave with a small flat flask tucked inside his cholera belt. The flask contained whisky, and had been thrust there by a friend ashore in an access of maudlin good-fellowship on parting. The night had been a convivial one, and Leading Seaman Biggers overlooked the gift until, coming on board, the keen-eyed officer of the watch drew his attention to it. He paid for the misplaced generosity of his well-wisher with his "Killick."*

He happened, moreover, to be employed in coiling down a rope—in the capacity he had reverted to—while his supplanter received the rating; but he eyed the ceremony stoically and without resentment. He had failed, and, of his

* Anchor. The distinctive badge of a leading rating.

less frail brethren, another was raised up in his stead. It was the immutable law.

"To be restored to the first class for leave."

A stout Able Seaman stepped forward, and, from force of a habit engendered by long familiarity with the etiquette of the defaulters' table, removed his cap.

"*Put* yer cap on," added the Master-at-Arms in a fierce undertone.

The suppliant deftly replaced his cap. As he did so a packet of cigarettes, a skein of darning worsted and a picture postcard (depicting a stout lady in a pink costume surf bathing) fell out on to the deck in the manner of an unexpected conjuring trick. An attendant ship's corporal retrieved them, while the conjurer affected an air of complete detachment.

The Captain glanced at the conduct book. "Clean sheet? Right—restored to the first class. And see if you can't stop in it this time."

The stout one made guttural noises in his throat intended to convey assurances of future piety, and departed with an expression that suggested a halo had not only descended upon his head, but had been crammed inextricably over his ears.

The last request-man — the man with "private affairs"—was a small leading stoker with a face seamed by innumerable tiny wrinkles. His skin resembled a piece of parch-

ment that somebody had crumpled in a fit of petulance and made a half-hearted attempt to smooth out again; even his ears were crumpled. His brown eyes, big and sad, were like the eyes of a suffering monkey.

The Commander interposed with an explanation: "This man wishes to see you about a private matter, sir."

The Captain made a little gesture with his hand, and the small group of officers and ship's police near the table stepped back a few paces out of earshot. The Commander, perhaps the busiest man on board, snatched the moment's respite to confer with the Carpenter, who had been hovering round waiting for his opportunity. The Master-at-Arms was standing by the bollards alternately sucking a stump of pencil and making cryptic notations in his request-book. The two ship's corporals had removed themselves with great delicacy of feeling to the screen door, where in an undertone they settled an argument as to whose turn it was to make out the leave tickets. The Captain's Clerk became interested in the progress of work in an ammunition lighter alongside.

The Captain, with knitted brows, was reading a letter that had been handed to him across the table. He folded it up when read, and handed it back to the recipient; then, holding his chin in his fist and supporting the elbow

with the other hand, he listened to the tale the small man with the crumpled ears had to unfold. It was an old tale—old when Helen first met the eyes of Paris. But there was no veil of romance to soften the outline of its crude tragedy. It was just sordid and pitiful.

For five minutes, perhaps, the two men faced each other. At the end of that time the Captain was leaning forward resting both hands on the table, talking in grave, kindly tones. He talked, not as Captains commonly talk to Leading Stokers, but as one man might talk to another who turned to him for advice in the bitter hour of need, drawing on the deep well of his experience, education, and kindly judgment.

"Troubles shared are troubles halved." The Captain had said so, and the tot of rum served out at one-bell to the little man with the crumpled ears went some way to complete the conviction.

* * * * *

Jeremiah Casey, Petty Officer and Captain's Coxswain, hauled himself nimbly up the Jacob's ladder to the quarter-boom and came inboard. The Captain was walking up and down, deep in thought, with his hands linked behind his back. Casey pattered up and saluted.

"I've bent on that noo mainsail, sir. . . . There's a nice li'l sailin' breeze, sir." Casey, hinting at a spin in the galley, somehow

reminded one of a spaniel when he sees the gun-case opened. Had he been blessed with a tail, he would most certainly have wagged it.

The Captain walked slowly aft and looked down into the galley lying at the quarter-boom. Few men could have resisted the appeal of that long slim boat with the water lapping invitingly against her clinker-built sides. The brasswork in her gleamed in the sun like jewels set in ivory, for the woodwork was as near the whiteness of ivory as holystone and sharkskin could make it. She had little white mats with blue borders on the thwarts and in the sternsheets, and her yoke, of curious Chinese design, had a history as mysterious and legendary as the diamonds of Marie Antoinette.

"Get her alongside," said the Captain. "I want to try that mainsail."

Five minutes later the galley was spinning across the sparkling waters of the harbour.

Once the Captain spoke, and the bowman moved his weight six inches forward. Then she sailed to his light touch on the helm as a violin gives out sound under the bow of a master.

Casey, sitting motionless on the bottom boards with the mainsheet in his hands, gazed rapturously at the new mainsail, and thence into the stolid countenance of the second stroke.

"Ain't she a *witch?*" he whispered.

For half an hour the galley skimmed to and fro among the anchored fleet, now running free

like a white-winged gull, anon close-hauled, the razor bows cleaving a path through the dancing water in a little sickle of creaming foam.

The Captain brought her alongside the gangway with faultless judgment and stood up. Like Saul, he had taken the cares of high command to a witch, and lo! his brow was clear and his eyes twinkled.

"Yes," he said in even tones as he stepped out of the boat, "that mainsail sets all right," and ran briskly up the ladder two steps at a time.

Casey thumbed the lacing on the yard. "Perfection is finality, and finality is death."

"I don't know but what I wouldn't shift the strop *'arf* an inch aft—mebbe a quarter . . ."

Inboard the ship's bell struck eight times, and the boatswain's mate began shrilly piping the hands to dinner.

IV

THE SEVEN-BELL BOAT

1

The last answering pendant from the Fleet shot up above the bridge rails, and the impatient semaphore on the Flagship's bridge commenced waving its arms.

The Yeoman of the Watch in the second ship of the line steadied his glass against an angle of the chart house. "'Ere y'are! Write down, one 'and." A Signal-boy stepped to his elbow with a pad and pencil in readiness.

"Flag—general: Leave may be granted to officers from 3.30 to 7 p.m. Officers are not to leave the vicinity of the town, and are to be prepared for immediate recall." He lowered the glass sharply. "Finish. Down Answer!"

Obedient to the order, a Signal-man brought the long tail of bunting down hand over hand. He hitched the slack of the halliard to the bridge rail and puckered his eyes, staring across the waters of the harbour to where the roofs of houses showed among the trees. "'Ow I pities orficers!" he observed under his breath, and walked to the end of the bridge.

The Seven-Bell Boat

The advertisement of a cinema theatre occupied a hoarding near the landing place; away to the left the sloping roof of what was unmistakably a brewery bore in huge block letters the exhortation:

DRINK PALE ALE

"Not 'arf," murmured the cynic at the end of the battleship's bridge. He mused darkly and added, "I don't think."

The Yeoman of the Watch took the pad from the boy's hand, scribbled a notation on it, and handed it back: "Commander an' Officer of the Watch, Wardroom, Gunroom, an' Warrant Officers' Mess. Smart!"

The boy flung himself down the ladder, sped aft along the fore-and-aft bridge, turned at the shelter-deck, descended another ladder, and brought up in the battery. Here the Commander came in view, conferring mysteriously with the Boatswain over a length of six-inch wire hawser that lay along the upper deck. The Boatswain, with gloom in his countenance, was indicating a section where the strands were flattened and the hemp "heart" protruded in a manner indicating that all was not well with the six-inch wire hawser. In fact, it rather resembled a snake that had been run over. The Commander was rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

The Signal-boy hovered on the outskirts of the conference. Bitter experience in the past

had taught him not to obtrude when deep called thus to deep.

"We must cut it where it's nipped, and put a splice in it, Mr. Cassidy," the Commander was saying, and turned his head.

The boy seized the opportunity to thrust the pad within range of the Commander's vision, one eye cocked on his face to note the effect of this momentous communication. He half expected that the Commander would throw his cap in the air and shout "Hurrah!"

The Commander read it unmoved. "Show it to the Officer of the Watch," he said, and turned again to the wire hawser. Truly a man of iron, reflected the Signal-boy as he saluted and ran aft in search of the Officer of the Watch.

The Officer of the Watch received the intelligence with almost equal unconcern, but when the boy had departed out of earshot he said something in an undertone and added: "Just my blooming luck." Then, raising his voice, he shouted: "Quartermaster! Picket-boat alongside at three-thirty for officers."

A head emerged from the hood of the after turret. The Gunnery Lieutenant, wearing overalls, a streak of dirt running diagonally down one cheek, emerged and drew off a greasy glove to wipe his face.

"Did I hear you say anything about a seven-bell boat?"

The Officer of the Watch nodded. "There's leave from three-thirty to seven p.m. It's three o'clock now, so I advise you to smack it about and clean if you're going ashore."

The Gunnery Lieutenant slid gracefully down the sloping shield of the turret. Fortunately, the consideration of paint-work vanished with the red dawn of August 5th, 1914.

"My word!" he said, staring towards the distant town. "My missus——" and vanished down the hatchway.

In the meanwhile the Signal-boy had descended to the wardroom, where he swiftly pinned the signal on to the notice board. The occupants of the arm-chairs and settee followed his movements with drowsy interest.

The Young Doctor rose and walked to the notice board.

"Snooks!" he ejaculated. "Leave!" And, with a glance at the clock, hurried out of the mess.

The remainder of his messmates sat up with excitement.

"What time?"

"When till?"

"What about a boat?"

The head of the Officer of the Watch appeared through the open skylight overhead. "Wake up, you Weary Willies. There's a boat to the beach at seven-bells."

"Come along, chaps," snorted the Major of

Marines. "*Allons nous shifter*—let us shift." And he, too, made tracks for his cabin, followed by everybody who could be spared by "the exigencies of the service" to experience for three blessed hours the joys of the land.

The shrill voices of the Midshipmen at their toilet in the after flat proclaimed that the precious moments were flying. Three were simultaneously performing their ablutions in one basin, the supply of water to the bathroom having failed with a suddenness that could only be attributed to the malignant agency of the Captain of the Hold.

Another burrowed feverishly in the depths of his sea-chest, presenting to the flat much the same appearance as a terrier does when busy at a rabbit-hole. He emerged flushed but triumphant with a limp garment in his grasp. "I knew I had a clean shirt," he confided to his neighbour. "I told my servant so a fortnight ago. He swore that every one I possessed had been left behind in the wash at Malta."

His neighbour made no reply, being in the throes of buttoning a collar which fitted him admirably at Osborne College, but which somehow had lately exhibited an obstinate determination to meet no more round his neck. However, physical strength achieved the miracle, and he breathed deeply. "I shouldn't sweat to shift your shirt," he consoled. "It looks all right. Turn the cuffs up."

"I've turned them up three times already," replied the excavator, donning his find. "There are limits."

Another Midshipman came across the crowded flat and calmly rummaged in the open till of the speaker's sea-chest. "Where's your hair juice? All right, I've got it." He anointed himself generously with a mysterious green fluid out of a bottle. "My people are staying at a pub ashore here. Will you come and have tea, Jaggers? Kedgeree's coming, too."

The owner of the green unguent, who was feverishly dusting his boots with a pyjama jacket, signified his pleasure in accepting the invitation.

The sentry on the aft-deck stepped to the head of the ladder with a bellows, on the mouth of which a small fog-horn was fitted, and gave a loud blast. It was the customary warning that the officers' boat would be alongside in five minutes.

The Assistant Clerk ran distractedly for the ladder.

"There's one 'G'! Have I got time to borrow five bob from the messman before the boat shoves off?"

"You might borrow five bob for me while you're about it," shouted a belated Engine-room Watchkeeper, struggling into his clothes.

"And me, too," called another. "Buck

up, for the Lord's sake, and we'll have poached eggs for tea."

"*And* cherry jam," supplemented another visionary voluptuously, "and radishes."

Here a figure, who had been sitting on the lid of his chest swinging his legs, tilted his cap on to the back of his head with a snort that suggested outlawry and defiance to the world at large.

"Hallo!" exclaimed a neighbour, wielding a clothes-brush with energy. "What's up? Aren't you coming ashore? It isn't your First Dog, is it?"

The outlaw shook his head. "No; my leave's jambed. You know that beastly six-inch wire hawser? We were bringing it to the after capstan yesterday, and the Commander——"

The aft-deck sentry gave two blasts on his fog-horn. Chest lids banged, keys rattled.

"Jolly rough luck!" commiserated his friend, and joined the stampede for the quarter-deck.

In thirty seconds the flat was deserted save for the disconsolate figure swinging his legs. Presently he climbed down from his chest and wended his way by devious and stealthy routes to the after conning-tower, where he smoked a surreptitious cigarette in defiance of the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions (his age being sixteen) and felt better.

In the meanwhile the picket-boat was driving her way shoreward with the emancipated members of Wardroom and Gunroom clustered on top of the cabin and in the stern sheets.

"Bunje," said the First Lieutenant, "come to the club and have tea and play 'pills' afterwards?"

The Indiarubber Man shook his head. "No, thanks; I'm afraid I—I've got something else to do."

The Paymaster contemplated him thoughtfully. "Bunje, my lad, the darkest suspicions fill my breast. Wherefore these carefully creased trousers, this liberal display of fine linen and flashing cuff-links withal? Our Sunday monkey-jacket, too. Can it be——? No." He appealed to the occupants of the stern sheets: "Don't tell me the lad is going poodle-faking!" *

"His hands are warm and moist," confirmed one of the Watchkeepers. "He wipes them furtively on the slack of his trousers in frightened anticipation."

The Indiarubber Man reddened. "You silly asses!"

The Junior Watchkeeper squirmed with delight. "He is—he *is!* He's going poodle-faking. And in war time, too! You dog, Bunje!"

* Paying calls.

"Can't a fellow know people ashore without a lot of untutored clowns trying to be funny about it?" demanded the victim.

"It's the spring," said the Young Doctor. "Bunje's young fancy is lightly turning—yes, it is." The Surgeon sniffed the air judicially. "The bay rum upon your hair proclaims it. Ah, me! The heyday of youth!" He sighed. "'Time was when love and I were well acquainted.'"

"That's a fact," retorted the Indiarubber Man bitterly. "But you needn't brag about it. I haven't been shipmates with you for four years for nothing. There's nothing you can tell me about your hideous past that I don't know already."

The picket-boat slid alongside the landing place and went astern.

The Engineer Commander made his way towards the little cabin. As the senior officer of the party, his was the privilege of embarking last and disembarking first. "Don't wait for me," he said. "Unstow! I've got to get my golf-clubs."

The Indiarubber Man took him at his word. "Right. I'll carry on, if I may." He leaped ashore, and set off with long strides in the direction of the town.

The First Lieutenant gazed after him. There was a general feeling that the Indiarubber Man had suddenly assumed an unfamiliar and inex-

plicable rôle. "Now, what the devil is he up to, I wonder?"

The others, mystified, shook their heads.

2

THE mothers of Midshipmen have a means of scenting the whereabouts of a fleet that mere censorship of letters cannot balk. There were at least half a dozen mothers in the *foyer* of the big, garish hotel on the sea-front. Some were *tête-à-tête* with their sons in snug, upholstered corners, learning aspects of naval warfare that no historian will ever record. Others presided over heavily laden tea-tables at which their sons and their sons' more intimate friends were dealing with eggs and buttered toast, marmalade, watercress, plum-cake, and toasted scones in a manner which convinced their half-alarmed relatives that famine must have stalked the British Navy ever since the War started.

"We shall never have time," said one mother, "to hear all you have to tell, dear."

"There's really nothing very much to tell you about, mother. Can I order some more jam? And Jaggers could scoff some more eggs, couldn't you, Jag? Waiter, two more poached eggs and some more strawberry jam. You see, dear, we haven't done anything exciting yet. That's all been the luck of the battle-cruisers and destroyers. They've had a topping rag—

three of our term have been wounded already. But we aren't allowed to gas about what we're going to do—why, that waiter might be a German spy, for all we know."

"Didn't know the Admiral confided his plans for the future to Midshipmen," commented an amused father, who had run down from the War Office for the day.

"He doesn't *confide* them," admitted another, "but my chest is in the flat outside his steward's cabin, and, of course, *he* hears an awful lot."

"But, Georgie, tell us about your life. Do you get enough sleep?" queried his mother.

"Rather," replied her son, whose horizon three months before had been bounded by the playing fields of Dartmouth College, where the dormitories are maintained at an even temperature by costly and hygienic methods. "We're in four watches, you know—we get one night in in four. At sea we sleep at our guns. I've got one of the six-inch, and we get up quite a good fug in our casemate at night. Jaggers dosses in the after-control. It's a bit breezy up there, isn't it, Old Bird?"

The Old Bird signified that the rigours of Arctic exploration were as nothing to what he had undergone.

"And your swimming-jacket—the one Aunt Jessie sent you? The outfitter said it was quite comfortable to wear. I hope you always do

wear it at sea, in case—in case you should ever need it."

Her son chuckled. "The pneumatic one? Well, we liked it awfully when it came, and we blew it up; and then we thought we'd have a bit of scrum practice one night after dinner, and we rolled it up for a ball, and—and the half wasn't nippy enough in getting it away to the three-quarters, and somehow or another it got punctured. But I *wear* it all right, mother. It's jolly warm at nights."

"And do you like your officers—is the Captain kind to you all?"

The boy stirred his tea thoughtfully.

"They're a topping lot. One has got the Humane Society's gold medal for jumping on top of a shark at Perim when it was just going to collar a fellow bathing—you'd never think it to look at him. There's another we call the Indiarubber Man, who takes us at physical drill every morning. He's frightfully strong, and they say he licked the Japanese ju-jitsu man they had at the School of Physical Training. And, of course, there's old Beggs. You know, he was captain of England—Rugger—some years ago. He's broken his nose three times. . . ."

"We all skylark together in the dog-watches," added another. "We put a seining-net round the quarter-deck, and play cricket or deck hockey every evening after tea to keep fit."

"And they come into the gun-room when we have a sing-song on guest nights, and kick up a frightful shine. Oh, they're an awful fine lot."

"The Captain is a topper, too. He has us to breakfast in turns."

A third took up the epic. If you have ever heard schoolboys vie with each other to laud and honour the glory of their own particular House among strangers in a strange land, you can imagine much that cannot be conveyed with the pen. There were similar tea parties in various corners of the hotel and in lodgings along the sea-front, but the conversation at all of them ran on much the same lines, and this may be considered a fair sample of the majority.

"He gives a lecture every few days showing what is going on at the front. His brother's a General, and, of course, he gets any amount of tips from him. The brother of one of our Snotties—Karrard—was killed at Mons, and the Captain sent for Karrard (who's rather a kid and felt it awfully) and showed him a letter from the General about Karrard's brother—he had seen him killed—which bucked Karrard up tremendously. In fact, he rather puts on side now, because he's the only one in the gun-room who has lost a brother."

"And you don't wish you were back at Dartmouth again?"

"Dartmouth!" The speaker's voice was almost scornful. "Why, mother, Kedgeree here would have got his First Eleven cap this term if we'd stayed, and even he——"

A small midshipman with remarkable steel-grey eyes, who had not hitherto spoken much, shook his head emphatically and flushed at hearing his nickname pronounced in open conversation ashore. "We were treated like kids there," he explained. "But now——" He jerked his head towards the north with that unfailing sense of the cardinal points of the compass which a seaman acquires in earliest youth, or not at all. Somewhere in that direction the German fleet was presumed to be skulking. "It's different," he ended a little lamely.

Suddenly the son leaned forward and pressed his mother's knee under the table. A tall, sinewy Engineer Commander was walking across the *foyer* on his way to the billiard room.

"There, mother, that's old Beggs. He had our term at Osborne. Did you see his nose? . . . Captain of England!" . . . The speaker broke off and lifted his head, listening.

Through the doorway opening on to the sea-front there drifted a faint sound, the silvery note of a distant bugle.

"Hush!" said one of the others, raising a warning hand. "Listen!"

A Tall Ship

8

At the window of one of the detached houses in the residential part of the town a small Naval Cadet stood with his nose flattened against the window-pane.

"I say, Betty," he ejaculated presently, "they're giving leave to the Fleet. I can see crowds of officers coming ashore."

His sister continued to knit industriously. "Well, I don't suppose any of them are coming here. You needn't get so excited."

Her brother watched the uniformed figures filing along the distant road from the landing place. "I hope this war goes on for another couple of years," he sighed.

"Joe! You mustn't say such dreadful things. You don't know what you're talking about."

"That's all jolly fine, but you haven't got to do another year at Osborne—— I say, Betty, one of them *is* coming here! How jolly exciting! He's coming up the avenue now. He's got red hair. . . . I believe—yes, it's—what was the name of that Lieutenant at Jack's wedding, d'you remember? The funny man. He made you giggle all the time."

For a moment the knitting appeared to demand his sister's undivided attention; she bent her head over it. "That was a long time ago—before I put my hair up. I'm sure I

didn't giggle either. Oh, yes, I think I remember who you mean. Is he coming here? I wonder—come away from the window, Joe!"

The front door bell rang in a distant part of the house; she dropped her knitting on a small side table and walked quietly out of the room. "I'll tell mother," she said as she went out.

"You needn't trouble to do that," said Joe. "She's out—I thought you knew." But the door had closed.

A moment later the Indiarubber Man was ushered in. The two representatives of His Majesty's Navy shook hands. "I recognised you from your photograph," said the host. "D'you remember the wedding group? You were a groomsman when Jack and Milly were married, weren't you?"

"I was," replied the Indiarubber Man. "I performed a number of menial offices that day. But were you there? I don't seem to remember you."

Joe shook his head. "No, I had mumps. Wasn't it rot? It must have been an awful good rag. But I remember about you because Betty told me afterwards—she's my sister, you know. She said you were—oh, here she is."

Betty entered. She cast one swift glance at her brother that might have been intended to convey interrogation or admonition, or both, and then greeted the Indiarubber Man with friendly composure. "How nice of you to

come and see us! Mother is out, I'm afraid, but she will probably be in presently. Do sit down. Yes, of course I remember you—Joe, ring the bell, and we'll have tea."

"We were 'opposite numbers' at your brother's wedding," said the Indiarubber Man, taking a seat, and nervously hitching up the legs of his trousers to an unnecessary extent.

"Yes, I remember restraining you with difficulty from going into the garden to eat worms! Nobody——" She broke off abruptly. "What a long time ago that seems!" She laughed quietly and considered him with merriment in her pretty eyes. The Indiarubber Man made a swift mental comparison between the schoolgirl bridesmaid who vied with midshipmen in devouring ices, and his hostess of three years or so later.

"Doesn't it?" he said. For one instant their eyes met, shyly questioning, a little curious. The laughter died out of hers.

"My eldest brother's in the North Sea now. We haven't seen him since the War started."

The Indiarubber Man nodded. "Yes, he's in a battle-cruiser, isn't he? We don't get ashore much either, as a matter of fact. But to-day——" He entered into a lengthy statement of naval policy that led up to his visit and the circumstances connected with it. It was a rather tedious explanation, but it filled in the time till tea arrived, when Betty busied herself

among the tea-cups; her brother drew his chair close to their guest, and sat regarding him with breathless expectancy. Was this the side-splitting humorist Betty had talked so much about for months after the wedding—and then abruptly refused to mention again?

Joe experienced a growing sense of disillusionment. There was nothing about the Indiarubber Man's conversation to justify high hopes of laughter-provoking humour. In fact, the guest's general demeanour compared unfavourably with that of the curate—a shy young man, victim (had Joe but known it) of a hopeless and unrequited passion.

Joe handed the Indiarubber Man his cup with the air of one prepared to enjoy at all events the spectacle of a juggling trick with the teaspoon or saucer. The guest's chief concern, however, appeared to be in finding a more secure resting-place for it than his knee, coupled with anxiety not to drop crumbs on the carpet.

Betty, presiding behind the silver tea-tray, had adopted her most grown-up manner. Decidedly it was all Betty's fault, therefore. The most confirmed humorist could hardly be expected to indulge in drolleries in the presence of a girl who stuck her nose in the air and put on enough side for six. It became increasingly obvious that the depressed jester must straightway be removed from this blighting influence or ever the cap and bells would jingle.

No sooner was tea over, therefore, than Joe sprang to his feet. "I say, would you like to go for a walk?" Once outside, the flower of wit would expand without a doubt.

The Indiarubber Man appeared nonplussed at the proposal. "I—it's very kind of you——" Then he turned to Betty. "Shall we all three go for a walk?"

"Oh, it's no use asking her to go for a proper walk," interposed the alarmed Joe. "Her skirts are too narrow; she can't keep step, or jump ditches, or anything."

Betty laughed. "Are you anxious to jump ditches, Mr. Standish? Because, if not, I think I might be able to keep up with you both." She rose to her feet, a slim, gracefully modelled young woman who looked perfectly capable of keeping up with anyone—or of jumping ditches, too, for that matter. "I'll get my things if you will wait a second." Joe, unseen by their guest, made a face at her of unfeigned brotherly disgust.

In the open air, however, the guest's spirits gave no more evidence of an upward tendency than they had indoors. The trio walked, via the sea front, to the gardens on top of the cliffs that overlooked the harbour. Joe directed the conversation; it was largely concerned with battle and bloodshed.

"Mr. Standish, what do you do in action?" he asked presently.

"Nothing," was the reply. "I just put my fingers in my ears and shut my eyes—I'm the officer of the after turret. But when it's all over I put on overalls and crawl about the works on my stomach and get a dirty face with the best of them. A wit once defined a turret as a bundle of tricks done up in armour."

"Is it thick armour?" asked Betty.

"They tell me it is—fellows on board who pretend to know everything. But I suspect that to be a mere ruse to get me to stay inside it."

Joe sighed. "I *do* envy you," he said. "Everyone seems to have something to do, 'cept me. Even Betty here——"

The Indiarubber Man turned his head sharply. "Why, what——"

Betty turned pink. "I'm going to nurse—on the East Coast. My old school has been turned into a hospital. And the other day Miss Dacre—she was the principal, you know, and she is nursing there now—wrote to mother and said they would take me."

"But," said the Indiarubber Man, "d'you think you could stick it—hacking off fellows' legs, and that sort of thing? Blessed if I could do it."

"Oh, yes," was the calm reply. "I passed all my exams. a long time ago—in fact, I've been working down here at this hospital for the last six months. We learned a good deal at school, you see. Home nursing, and so on."

"Did you, by Jove! Simple dishes for the sick-room and spica bandages, and all the rest of it?"

Betty laughed. "Oh, yes, all that."

The Indiarubber Man glanced at her small, capable hands, and from them to the dainty profile beside him. "Well," he said, "if I get bent by an eight-inch shell I shall know where to come."

Betty laughed again. "I should have to look that up in a book, then, before I nursed you. It might mean complications!"

"It might," replied the Indiarubber Man.

From the town below, where here and there a window went suddenly aflare with the reflection of the sunset-light, there drifted up to them the faint, clear call of a bugle. Another took it up along the front, and yet another. The Indiarubber Man raised his head abruptly.

"That's the recall!" he said, and turned towards the ships. "Yes, they've hoisted the Blue Peter. I wonder—the boats are coming in, too."

"Does that mean you must go at once?"

He nodded soberly. "I'm afraid so," and held out his hand. "Good-bye."

"Hallo!" said Joe. "I say, you're not off, are you? What's up?"

"That's what I'm going to find out," was the reply. "I believe it's another of their

dodges to lure me inside my turret. Good-bye, Miss Betty. Don't forget to read up the book of the words—in case of complications. . . . Good-bye!" The Indiarubber Man departed down one of the steep paths that led to the lower road and the landing-place. The brother and sister turned and walked slowly back to the house.

Their conversation on the way was confined to speculation on the part of Joe as to the reason for this sudden recall. His theories covered a wide range of possibilities. Only when they reached the house did Betty volunteer a remark, and then in the privacy of her own room, whose window looked out across the harbour and the sea.

"Oh, I hate the War," she said. "I hate it, I *hate* it. . . ."

V

THE KING'S PARDON

Ask the first thousand bluejackets you meet ashore, any afternoon the Fleet is giving leave, why they joined the navy. Nine hundred and ninety-nine will eye you suspiciously, awaiting the inevitable tract. If none is forthcoming they will give a short, grim laugh, shake their heads, and, as likely as not, expectorate. These portents may be taken to imply that they really do not know themselves, or are too shy to say so, if they do.

The thousandth does not laugh. He may shake his head; spit he certainly will. And then, scenting silent sympathy, he guides you to a quiet bar-parlour where you can pay for his beer while he talks.

This is the man with a past and a grievance.

* * * * *

Nosey Baines, Stoker Second-class, was a man with a past. He also owned a grievance when he presented himself for entry into His Majesty's Navy. They were about his only possessions.

"Nosey" was not, of course, his strict

baptismal name. That was Orson—no less. Therein lay the past. "Nosey" was the result of facial peculiarities quite beyond his control. His nose was out of proportion to the remainder of his features. This system of nomenclature survives from the Stone Age, and, sailors being conservative folk, still finds favour on the lower-decks of H.M. Ships and Vessels.

The Writer in the Certificate Office at the Naval Depot, where Nosey Baines was entered for service as a Second-class Stoker under training, had had a busy morning. There had been a rush of new entries owing to the conclusion of the hop-picking season, the insolvency of a local ginger-beer bottling factory, and other mysterious influences. Nosey's parchment certificate (that document which accompanies a man from ship to ship, and, containing all particulars relating to him, is said to be a man's passport through life) was the nineteenth he had made out that morning.

"Name?"

Nosey spelt it patiently.

"Religion?"

Nosey looked sheepish and rather flattered—as a Hottentot might if you asked him for the address of his tailor. The Writer gave the surface of the parchment a preparatory rub with a piece of indiarubber. "Well, come on—R. C., Church of England. Methodist . . . ?"

Nosey selected the second alternative. It sounded patriotic at all events.

"Next o' kin? Nearest relative?"

"Never 'ad none," replied Nosey haughtily. "I'm a norfun."

"Ain't you got *no* one?" asked the weary Writer. He had been doing this sort of thing for the last eighteen months, and it rather bored him. "S'pose you was to die—wouldn't you like no one to be told?"

Nosey brought his black brows together with a scowl and shook his head. This was what he wanted, an opportunity to declare his antagonism to all the gentler influences of the land. . . . If he were to die, even . . .

The Ship's Corporal, waiting to guide him to the New Entry Mess, touched him on the elbow. The Writer was gathering his papers together. A sudden wave of forlornness swept over Nosey. He wanted his dinner, and was filled with emptiness and self-pity. The world was vast and disinterested in him. There were evidences on all sides of an unfamiliar and terrifying discipline. . . .

"You come allonger me," said the voice of the Ship's Corporal, a deep, alarming voice, calculated to inspire awe and reverence in the breast of a new entry. Nosey turned, and then stopped irresolutely. If he were to die——

"'Ere," he said, relenting. "Nex' o' kin —I ain't got none. But I gotter fren'." He

coloured hotly. "Miss Abel's 'er name; 14 Golder's Square, Bloomsbury, London. Miss J. Abel."

This was Janie—the Grievance. It was to punish Janie that Nosey had flung in his lot with those who go down to the sea in ships.

Prior to this drastic step Nosey had been an errand-boy, a rather superior kind of errand-boy, who went his rounds on a ramshackle bicycle with a carrier fixed in front. Painted in large letters on the carrier was the legend:

J. Holmes & Son,
FISHMONGER, ICE, ETC.,

and below, in much smaller letters, "Cash on delivery."

Janie was a general servant in a Bloomsbury boarding-house. She it was who answered the area door when Nosey called to deliver such kippers and smoked haddock as were destined by the gods and Mr. Holmes for the boarding-house breakfast table.

It is hard to say in what respect Janie lit the flame of love within Nosey's breast. She was diminutive and flat-chested; her skin was sallow from life-long confinement in basement sculleries and the atmosphere of the Bloomsbury boarding-house. She had little beady black eyes, and a print dress that didn't fit her at all well. One stocking was generally coming down in folds over her ankle. Her hands were

chapped and nubbly—pathetic as the toil-worn hands of a woman alone can be. Altogether she was just the little unlovely slavey of fiction and the drama and everyday life in boarding-house-land.

Yet the fishmonger's errand-boy—Orson Baines, by your leave, and captain of his soul—loved her as not even Antony loved Cleopatra.

Janie met him every other Sunday as near three o'clock as she could get away. The Sunday boarding-house luncheon included soup on its menu, which meant more plates to wash up than usual. They met under the third lamp-post on the left-hand side going towards the British Museum.

Once a fortnight, from 3 p.m. till 10 p.m., Janie tasted the penultimate triumph of womanhood. She was courted. Poor Janie!

No daughter of Eve had less of the coquette in her composition. Not for a moment did she realise the furrows that she was ploughing in Nosey's amiable soul. Other girls walked out on their Sundays. The possession of a young man—even a fishmonger's errand-boy on twelve bob a week—was a necessary adjunct to life itself. Of all that "walking out" implied: of love, even as it was understood in Bloomsbury basements, Janie's anæmic little heart suspected very little; but romance was there, fluttering tattered ribbons, luring her on through the drab fog of her workaday existence.

It was otherwise with Nosey. His love for Janie was a very real affair, although what sowed the seeds was not apparent, and although the soil in which they took root and thrived—the daily interviews at the area door and these fortnightly strolls—seemed, on the face of it, inadequate. Perhaps he owed his queer gift of constancy to the mysterious past that gave him his baptismal name. They were both unusual.

A certain Sunday afternoon in early autumn found them sitting side by side on a seat in a grubby London square. Janie, gripping the handle of cook's borrowed umbrella, which she held perpendicularly before her, the toes of her large boots turned a little inwards, was sucking a peppermint bull's-eye.

To Nosey the hour and the place seemed propitious, and he proposed heroic marriage.

"Lor!" gasped Janie, staring before her at the autumn tints that were powdering the dingy elms with gold-dust. There was mingled pride and perplexity in her tones; slowly she savoured the romantic moment to the full, turning it over in her mind as the bull's-eye revolved in her cheek, before finally putting it from her. Then:

"I couldn't marry you," she said gently. "You ain't got no prospecks." Walking out with twelve bob a week was one thing; marriage quite a different matter.

In the Orphanage where she had been reared

from infancy the far-seeing Sisters had, perhaps, not been unmindful of the possibility of this moment. A single life of drudgery and hardship, even as a boarding-house slavey, meant, if nothing more, meals and a roof over her head. Improvident marriage demanded, sooner or later, starvation. This one star remained to guide her when all else of the good Sisters' teaching grew dim in her memory.

Prospecks—marry without and you were done. So ran Janie's philosophy. The remains of the bull's-eye faded into dissolution.

Nosey was aghast. The perfidy of women!

"You led me on!" he cried. "You bin carryin' on wiv me. . . . 'Ow could you? Pictur' palaces an' fried fish suppers an' all." He referred to the sweets of their courtship. "'Ow, Janie!"

Janie wept.

After that the daily meetings at the area door were not to be thought of. Nosey flung himself off in a rage, and for two successive nights contemplated suicide from the parapet of Westminster Bridge. The irksome round of duties on the ramshackle bicycle became impossible. The very traffic murmured the name of Janie in his ears. London stifled him; he wanted to get away and bury himself and his grief in new surroundings. Then his eye was caught by one of the Admiralty recruiting posters in the window of a Whitehall post office.

It conjured up a vision of a roving, care-free life . . . of illimitable spaces and great healing winds. . . . A life of hard living and hard drinking, when a man could forget.

But somehow Nosey didn't forget.

* * * * *

The Navy received him without emotion. They cut his hair and pulled out his teeth. They washed and clothed and fed him generously. He was taught in a vast echoing drill-shed to recognise and respect authority, and after six months' preliminary training informed that he was a Second-class Stoker, and as such drafted to sea in the Battle-Cruiser Squadron.

Here Nosey found himself an insignificant unit among nearly a thousand barefooted, free-fisted, cursing, clean-shaven men, who smelt perpetually of soap and damp serge, and comprised the lower-deck complement of a British battle-cruiser.

He worked in an electric-lit, steel tunnel, with red-hot furnaces on one side, and the gaping mouths of coal caverns on the other. You reached it by perpendicular steel ladders descending through a web of hissing steam pipes and machinery; once across greasy deck-plates and through a maze of dimly lit alleys, you would find Nosey shovelling coal into the furnaces under the direction of a hairy-chested individual afflicted, men said, by religious mania, who sucked pieces of coal as an antidote to

chronic thirst, and spat about him indiscriminately.

There were eight-hour intervals in this work, during which Nosey slept or ate his meals or played a mouth-organ in the lee of one of the turret-guns on deck, according to the hour of the day. He slept in a hammock slung in an electric-lit passage far below the water-line; the passage was ten feet wide, and there were six hammocks slung abreast along the entire length of it.

He ate his meals in a mess with twenty other men, the mess consisting of a deal plank covered with oilcloth for a table, and two narrower planks on either side as seats; there were shelves for crockery against the ship's side. All this woodwork was scrubbed and scoured till it was almost as white as ivory. Other messes, identical in every respect, situated three feet apart, ranged parallel to each other as far as the steel, enamelled bulkheads. There were twenty men in each mess, and seventeen messes on that particular mess-deck, and here the members simultaneously ate, slept, sang, washed their clothes, cursed and laughed, skylarked or quarrelled all round during the waking hours of their watch-off.

Still Nosey did not forget.

* * * * *

Then came Janie's letter from the Middlesex Hospital. Janie was in a "decline."

The men who go down into trenches in the firing-line are, if anything, less heroic than the army of cooks and Janies who descend to spend their lives in the basement "domestic offices" of Bloomsbury. Dark and ill-ventilated in summer, gas-lit and airless throughout the foggy winter. Flight upon flight of stairs up which Janie daily toiled a hundred times before she was suffered to seek the attic she shared with cook under the slates. Overwork, lack of fresh air and recreation—all these had told at last.

Nosey availed himself of week-end leave from Portsmouth to journey up to London, and was permitted an interview with her in the big airy ward. Neither spoke much; at no time had they been great conversationalists, and now Janie, more diminutive and angular than ever, lost in the folds of a flannel nightgown, was content to hold his hand as long as he was allowed to remain.

The past was ignored, or nearly so.

"You didn't orter gone off like that," said Janie reproachfully. "But I'm glad you're a sailor. You looks beautiful in them clothes. An' there's prospecks in the Navy." Poor little Janie: she had "prospecks" herself at last.

He left the few flowers he had brought with the sister of the ward when the time came to leave. The nurse followed him into the corridor.

"Come and see her every visiting day you can," she said. "It does her good and cheers her. She often speaks of you."

Nosey returned to Portsmouth and his ship. His mess—the mess-deck itself—was agog with rumours. Had he heard the "buzz"? Nosey had not. "I bin to London to see a fren'," he explained.

Then they told him.

The battle-cruiser to which he belonged had been ordered to join the Mediterranean Fleet. That was Monday; they were to sail for Malta on Thursday.

And Janie was dying in the Middlesex Hospital.

* * * * *

The next visiting day found him at Janie's bedside. But, instead of his spick-and-span serge suit of "Number Ones" and carefully ironed blue collar, Nosey wore a rusty suit of "civvies" (civilian clothes). Instead of being clean-shaven, an inconsiderable moustache was feeling its way through his upper lip.

"Where's your sailor clothes?" asked Janie weakly.

Nosey looked round to reassure himself that they were not overheard. "I done a bunk!" he whispered.

Janie gazed at him with dismayed eyes. "Not—not deserted?"

Nosey nodded. "Don't you take on, Janie.

'S only so's I can stay near you." He pressed her dry hand. "I got a barrer—whelks an' periwinkles. I've saved a bit o' money. An' now I can stay near you an' come 'ere visiting days."

Janie was too weak to argue or expostulate. It may have been that she was conscious of a certain amount of pride in Nosey's voluntary outlawry for her sake; and she was glad enough to have someone to sit with her on visiting days and tell her about the outside world she was never to see again. She even went back in spirit to the proud days when they walked out together. . . . It brought balm to the cough-racked nights and the weary passage of the days.

Then the streets echoed with the cries of paper-boys. The nurses whispered together excitedly in their leisure moments; the doctors seemed to acquire an added briskness. Once or twice she heard the measured tramp of feet in the streets below, as a regiment was moved from one quarters to another.

England was at war with Germany, they told her. But the intelligence did not interest Janie much at first. That empires should battle for supremacy concerned her very little—till she remembered Nosey's late calling.

It was two days before she saw him again, and he still wore his "civvy" suit. Janie smiled as he approached the bed, and fumbled

with the halfpenny daily paper that somebody had given her to look at.

"'Ere," she whispered, "read that."

Nosey bent over and read the lines indicated by the thin forefinger.

> His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve of pardons being granted to all deserters from the Royal Navy and Marines who surrender themselves forthwith.

There was silence in the ward for a moment. Far below in the street outside a transport wagon rumbled by. Janie braced herself for the supreme act of her life.

"You gotter go," said she.

Nosey stared at her and then back at the newspaper. "Not me!" he retorted, and took possession of her hand.

"That's the King's pardon," said Janie, touching the halfpenny news-sheet with transparent fingers. "'Tain't no use you comin' 'ere no more, 'cos I won't see you. I'll ask 'em at the door not to let you in."

Nosey knew that note of indomitable obstinacy in the weak voice. He knew, as he sat looking down upon the fragile atom in the bed, that he could kill her with the pressure of a finger.

But there was no way of making Janie go back on her decision once her mind was made up. "If there's a war, you orter be fightin',"

she added. "There's prospecks . . ." Her weak voice was almost inaudible, and the nurse was coming down the ward towards them.

Nosey lifted the hot, dry little claw to his lips. "If you sez I gotter go, I'll go," and rose to his feet.

"'Course you gotter go. The King sez so, an' I sez so. Don't you get worritin' about me; I'll be all right when you comes 'ome wiv yer medals. . . ."

Nosey caught the nurse's eye and tiptoed out of the ward. Janie turned her face to the Valley of the Shadow.

VI

AN OFF-SHORE WIND

THE circular rim of the fore-top took on a harder outline as the sky paled at the first hint of dawn.

From this elevation it was possible to make out the details of the ships astern, details that grew momentarily more distinct. Day, awakening, found the Battle Fleet steaming in line ahead across a smooth grey sea. The smoke from the funnels hung like a long dark smear against the pearly light of the dawn; but as the pearl changed to primrose and the primrose to saffron, the sombre streamers dissolved into the mists of morning.

Somewhere among the islands on our starboard bow a little wind awoke and brought with it the scent of heather and moist earth. It was a good smell—just such a smell as our nostrils had hungered for for many months—and it stirred a host of vagrant memories as it went sighing past the halliards and shrouds.

It was the turn of the Indiarubber Man (with whom I had shared the night's vigil aloft)

to snatch a "stretch off the land" with his back against the steel side of our erie. He shifted his position uneasily, and the hood of his duffel-suit fell back: his face, in the dawning, looked white and tired and unshaven. Cinders had collected in the folds of the thick garment as wind-blown snow lies in the hollows of uneven ground.

As I stood looking down at him an expression of annoyance passed across his sleeping countenance.

"Any old where——" he said in a clear, decisive voice. "Down a rabbit-hole . . ."

And I laughed because the off-shore wind had fluttered the same page in the book of pleasant memories that we both shared. The petulant expression passed from his face, and he sank into deeper oblivion, holding the Thermos flask and binoculars against him like a child clasping its dolls in its sleep.

It was just before we mobilised for the summer—a mobilisation which, had we but known it, was to last until our book of pleasant memories was thumbed and dog-eared and tattered with much usage—that the Indiarubber Man suggested taking a day off and having what he called a "stamp." He fetched our ordnance map and spread it on the ward-room table, and we pored over it most of the evening, sucking our pipes.

All Devon is good: and for a while the lanes

had called us, winding from one thatched village to another between their fragrant, high-banked hedges. "Think of the little pubs . . ." said the Indiarubber Man dreamily. We thought of them, but with the vision came one of cyclists of the grey-sweater variety, and motorists filling the air with petrol fumes and dust.

There was the river: woodland paths skirting in the evening a world of silver and grey, across which bats sketched zigzag flights. Very nice in the dimpsey light, but stuffy in the daytime. So the moor had it in the end. We would trudge the moor from north to south, never seeing a soul, and, aided by map and compass, learn the peace of a day spent off the beaten tracks of man.

We had been in the train some time before the Indiarubber Man made his electrifying discovery.

"Where's the map?" We eyed one another severely and searched our pockets. "We were looking at it before I went to get the tickets," he pursued. "I gave it to you to fold up."

So he had. I left it on the station seat.

At a wayside station bookstall we managed to unearth an alleged reproduction of the fair face of South Devon to replace the lost map.

The Indiarubber Man traced the writhings of several caterpillars with his pipe-stem. "These are tors," he explained generously. After this we studied the map in silence, vainly

attempting to confirm our recollections of a course marked out the previous evening on an ordnance survey map.

We were both getting slightly confused when, with a screech of brakes, the train pulled up at the little moorside station that was our destination by rail. Sunlight bathed the grey buildings on the platform and the sleepy village beyond. From the blue overhead came the thin, sweet notes of a lark, and as we listened in the stillness we heard a faint whispering "swish" like the sound of a very distant reaper. It was the wind flowing across miles of reeds and grass and heather from the distant Atlantic. But it was not until half an hour later, when we breasted the crest of the great hog-back that stretched before us like a rampart, that we ourselves met the wind. It came out of the west, athwart the sun's rays, a steady rush of warm air; and with it came the tang of the sea and hint of honey and new-mown hay that somehow clings to Devon moorland through all the changing seasons.

A cluster of giant rocks piled against the sky to our left drew us momentarily out of our course. With some difficulty we scrambled up their warm surfaces, where the lichen clung bleached and russet, and stood looking out across the rolling uplands of Devon. Worthier adventurers would have improved the shining hour with debate as to the origin of this upflung heap

of Nature's masonry. Had it served departed Phœnicians as an altar? Heaven and the archæologists alone knew.

To the northward the patchwork of plough and green corn, covert and hamlet commenced at the edge of the railway and stretched undulating over hill and dale to where a grey smudge proclaimed the sea.

South lay the moor, inscrutable and mysterious, dotted with the monuments of a people forgotten before walls ringed the seven hills of Rome. The outlines of tors, ever softening in the distance, led the eye from rugged crest to misty beacon till, forty miles away, they dissolved into the same grey haze.

The Indiarubber Man pointed a lean, prophetic forefinger to the rolling south. "There's Wheatwood," he said. "Come on." And so, shouldering our coats, with the hot sunlight on our right cheeks and the day before us, we started across Dartmoor.

For nearly two hours the tor from which we had started watched with friendly reassurance over intervening hills; then it dipped out of sight, and we were conscious of a sudden loneliness in a world of enigmatic hut-circles, peopled by sheep and peewits. We were working across a piece of ground intersected by peat-cuttings, and after half an hour of it the Indiarubber Man fished out the map and compass from his pocket.

"There ought to be a clump of trees, a hut-circle, and a Roman road knocking about somewhere. Can you see anything of them?"

I searched the landscape through glasses from my recumbent position in the heather, but prolonged scrutiny failed to reveal a single tree, nor was the Roman road startlingly obvious in the trackless waste. Our map had proved too clever for us. In the circumstances there was only one thing to be done. With awful calm we folded the sheet, tore it into little pieces, and hid them in a rabbit-hole.

For about five miles after that we kept along a promontory that shouldered its way across an undulating plain, ringed in the distance by purple hills; then we sighted our distant landmark—a conical beacon—that we had been steering for. We were descending, thigh-deep in bracken, when the wind bore down to us from a dot against the skyline of a ridge the tiniest of thin whistles. A few minutes later a sheep-dog raced past in the direction of a cluster of white specks. For a while we watched it, and each lithe, effortless bound, as it passed upon its quest, struck a responsive chord within us—we who floundered clumsily among the boulders in our path.

But, for all this momentary exhilaration, it seemed a long time later that we struck the source of the burn which would in time guide us to our half-way halting place. To us, who

had been nurtured on its broad bosom,* there was something almost pathetic—as in meeting an old nurse in much reduced circumstances—about this trickle among the peat and moss. Lower down, however, it widened, and the water poured over granite boulders, with a bell-like contralto note, into a succession of amber pools.

There we shed our few garments on the bank, and the moments that followed, from the first exultant thrill as the water effervesced over our bodies till we crawled out dripping to dry in the wind and sun, seemed to hold only gratitude—an immense undefined gratitude to the Power that held all life. At its heels came hunger, wonderfully well defined.

Lower down, where the road that stretches like a white ribbon over the bosom of the moor crosses the river, there is an inn. I will not name it: writers of poems and guide-books—worthier penmen all—have done that. Besides, quite enough people go there as it is. We dropped, via a kine-scented yard and over a seven-foot bank, into the road abreast the inn door, and here a brake, freighted with tourist folk, brought us suddenly back to the conventions that everyday life demands.

True, we were never fain to cling to these; but, standing there on the King's high-road, clad in football knickers and thin jerseys, sun-

* The River Dart.

burnt and dishevelled, we were conscious of a sudden immense embarrassment. And, in sooth, had we dropped from the skies or been escaping from the grey prison not far distant, the tenants of the brake could hardly have been less merciful in their scrutiny or comments.

After the clean wind of the moor, the taint of the last meal and over-clad fellow-beings seemed to cling unpleasantly to the low-ceilinged room whither we fled, and I do not think we breathed comfortably again till we had paid our bill and returned to the sunlight. Before leaving we inquired the time, and learned it was nearly four o'clock.

One ought to "know the time," it seems, among men's haunts; but, once out of sight of these, it suffices, surely, to eat when hungry, sleep when tired, roam as long as daylight and legs will let one—in fine, to share with the shaggy ponies and browsing sheep a lofty disregard for all artificial divisions of the earth's journey through space. And our joint watch happened at the time to be undergoing repairs in Plymouth.

To follow the ramifications of a road gives one no lasting impression of the surrounding country, but directly a wanderer has to depend on landmarks as a guide, all his powers of observation quicken. One ragged hill-top guided us to another, across valleys scored with the workings of forgotten tin-mines. A brook,

crooning its queer, independent moor-song between banks of peat, rambled beside us for some time. Then, as if wearying of our company, it turned abruptly and was lost to view; in the summer stillness of late afternoon we heard it babbling on long after our ways separated.

If the truth be known, I suspect it deemed us dullish dogs. But we were tiring—not with the jaded weariness begotten of hard roads, when the spine aches and knees stiffen; no, a comfortable lassitude was slackening our joints and bringing thoughts of warm baths and supper. However, our shadows, valiant fellows, swung along before us across the rusty bracken with a cheerful constancy, and, encouraged by their ever-lengthening strides and by the solitude, we even found heart to lift our voices in song. Now and again small birds fled upwards with shrill twitters at our approach, and settled again to resume their interrupted suppers; but after a while they left for their roosts in the rowans and sycamores to the south, and rabbits began to show themselves in the open spaces among the furze. As if reluctantly, the perfect day drew to its close.

We raced up the flank of a long ridge to keep the setting sun in view, reaching the crest as it dipped to meet a ragged tor, and sank in a golden glow. A little wind, like a tired sigh, ruffled the tops of the heather, swayed the grass an instant, and was gone.

"Ah-h-h!" breathed the Indiarubber Man in the stillness.

A thousand feet below us smoke was curling from the thickly wooded valley. It was five miles away, but somewhere amid those trees men brewed and women baked.

"Come on," he added tensely. "Beer!"

As we descended into the lowlands a widening circle of night was stealing up into the sky —the blue-grey and purple of a pigeon's breast. A single star appeared in the western sky, intensifying the peace of the silent moor behind us. Stumbling through twilit woods and across fields of young barley, we met a great dog-fox *en route* for someone's poultry-run. He bared his teeth with angry effrontery as he sheered off and gave us a wide berth across the darkening fields. Doubtless he claimed his supremacy of hour and place, as did the sheep-dog that passed us so joyously earlier in the day. And, after all, what were we but interlopers from a lower plane!

The thirty-odd miles of our ramble reeled up like a tape-measure as we reached the lane, splashed with moonlight, that led us to the village. The gateway to every field held a pair of lovers whispering among the shadows: yet inexplicably they seemed an adjunct of their surroundings and the faintly bewildering night-scents. A dog sitting at the gate of a cottage uttered a short bark as we neared his domain;

then, with a queer grumbling whimper, he came to us across the dust, and perhaps because —as far as is given to man in his imperfections —we had not wittingly done evil that day, he slobbered at our hands.

In the flagged and wainscotted parlour of the village inn a child brought us bread and cheese and froth-crested mugs of beer. While we ate and drank, she watched us with tranquil interest in violet-coloured eyes that foretold a sleepless night for some bucolic swain in years to come.

The Indiarubber Man finished his last draught and stood up with a mighty sigh to loosen his belt. Then, bending down, he took the child's flower-like face between his hands:

"'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,'" he said gravely. Beer was ever prone to lend a certain smack of Scripture to his remarks.

"Surt'nly," said the little maid, all uncomprehending, and ran out to fetch our reckoning.

* * * * *

The Thermos flask slid with a clatter on to the steel deck of the top, and the Indiarubber Man opened his eyes. He yawned and stretched himself and rose stiffly to his feet.

The first rays of the sun were rising out of the sea. "Hai-yah!" He yawned. "Another

bloomin' day. . . . I was dreaming . . . about . . . blowed if I can remember what I was dreaming about." He adjusted the focus of his glasses and stared out across the North Sea. "I wonder if they're coming out to-day."

It was the two hundred and seventy-third morning we had wondered that.

VII

THE DAY

1

ALTHOUGH it all happened in that dim, remote period of time "Before the War," Torps and the First Lieutenant, the Indiarubber Man (who was the Lieutenant for Physical Training Duties), the Junior Watchkeeper, and others who participated, long afterwards referred to it as "The Day."

Since then they have seen their own gunfire sink an enemy's ship as a well-flung brick disposes of an empty tin on the surface of a pond. The after twelve-inch guns, astride whose muzzles David and Freckles once soared to the giddy stars, have hurled instantaneous and awful death across leagues of the North Sea. The X-ray apparatus, by the agency of which Cornelius James desired to see right through his own "tummy," has enabled the Fleet Surgeon to pick fragments of steel out of tortured bodies, as a conjurer takes things out of a hat. The after-cabin, that had witnessed so many informal tea-and-muffin parties, has been an ether-reeking hospital.

Yet these memories grew blurred in time, as mercifully such memories do. It was another and more fragrant one that sweetened the grim winter vigil in the North, when every smudge of smoke on the horizon might have been the herald of Armageddon. They were yet to see men die by scores in the shambles of a wrecked battery, by hundreds on the shell-torn decks of a ship that sank, fighting gallantly to the last. And the recollection of what I am about to relate doubtless supplied sufficient answer to the question that at such times assails the minds of men.

Two who helped in that unforgettable good-night scene on the aft-deck were destined to add their names to the Roll of Britain's Honour. It is not too much to hope that the echo of children's merriment guided their footsteps through that dark Valley of the Shadow to the peaks of Eternal Laughter which lie beyond.

* * * * *

It all started during one of those informal tea-parties the Skipper's Missus sometimes held in the after-cabin. They were delightful affairs. You needn't accept the invitation if you didn't want to; there was no necessity to put on your best monkey-jacket if you did. You were just told to "blow in" if you wanted some tea, and then you made your own toast, and there was China tea, in a big blue-and-white pot, that scented the whole cabin.

A Tall Ship

The Skipper's Missus sat by the fire, with her hands linked round her knees in her habitually graceful and oddly characteristic attitude; Torps and Jess, those gentle philosophers, occupied the chintz-covered settee; the A.P. sat on the hearth-rug, cross-legged like a tailor, so that he could toast and consume the maximum number of muffins with the minimum amount of exertion; the Junior Watchkeeper, who by his own admission "went all the bundle on his tea," and the Indiarubber Man, who was clumsy with a tea-cup, shared the table and a jam-pot, and sat munching, tranquil-eyed, like a pair of oxen in a stall.

The Captain and the First Lieutenant were rummaging through the drawers of the kneehole table in search of an ancient recipe of the former's for manufacturing varnish of a peculiar excellence wherewith to beautify the corticene on the aft-deck.

"How are the children?" asked the Torpedo Lieutenant, helping himself to milk and Jess to a lump of sugar. "Out of quarantine yet?"

"Yes," replied the youthful mother of Georgina, Jane, and Cornelius James. "At last, poor things! Christmas *is* such a wretched time to have measles. No parties, no Christmas-tree——"

The A.P. looked up from the absorbing task of buttering a muffin to his satisfaction. "D'you remember the Christmas when you all

came on board—wasn't it a rag? I broke my glasses because I was a tiger. I was *that* fierce."

"And I was chased by the dockyard police all the way from the Admiral Superintendent's garden with a young fir-tree under my arm. We had it for a Christmas-tree in the ward-room. Do you remember?"

They were all old friends, you see, and had served two commissions in succession with this Captain.

"Isn't it rather hard on the *Chee-si's?*" asked Torps, "being done out of their parties—no, Jess, three lumps are considered quite enough for little dogs to consume at one sitting."

The Skipper's Missus looked across the cabin at her husband: "Tim, your tea's getting cold. Why shouldn't we have a children's party on board one day next week? It isn't too late, is it?"

"Yes, sir," chimed in the Indiarubber Man. "A *pukka* children's party, with wind-sails for them to slither down and a merry-go-round on the after-capstan?"

The Captain drank his tea thoughtfully; his blue eyes twinkled. "Let us have a definition of *children*, Standish. I seem to remember a certain bridesmaid at the Gunnery Lieutenant's wedding of what I believe is technically called the 'flapper' age——"

"Quite right, sir," cut in the Torpedo

Lieutenant. "Our lives were a misery for weeks afterwards. He burbled about 'shy flowerets' in his sleep, sir——"

The Indiarubber Man blushed hotly. "Not 't'all, sir. They're talking rot. She thought I was ninety, and daft at that. They always do," he added sighing, the sigh of a sore heart that motley traditionally covers.

"I propose that we have no one older than Georgina or younger than Cornelius James," suggested the Junior Watchkeeper. "That limits the ages to between ten and seven, and then I think Standish's susceptible heart would be out of danger."

"How many children do you propose to turn loose all over the ship?" inquired the First Lieutenant dourly. "No one seems to have taken my paint-work into consideration. It's all new this week."

The Skipper's Missus laughed softly. "We were so concerned about Mr. Standish's heart, Mr. Hornby, that we quite forgot your paint-work. Couldn't it be all covered up just for this once? Besides, they are such tiny children . . ."

There are many skippers' missuses, but only one mother of Georgina, Jane, and Cornelius James.

The First Lieutenant capitulated.

"I vote we don't have any grown-ups, either," contributed the Junior Watchkeeper,

"except ourselves. Mothers and nurses always spoil children's parties."

The mother of Georgina, Jane, and Cornelius James wrung her hands in mock dismay. "Oh, but mayn't I come? I promise not to spoil anything—I love parties so!"

The A.P. rushed in where an angel might have been excused for faltering. "Glegg means that you don't count as a grown-up at a children's party," he explained naively, regarding the Skipper's Missus through his glasses with dog-like devotion.

She laughed merrily. "You pay a pretty compliment, Mr. Gerrard!"

"Double-O" Gerrard reddened and lapsed into bashful silence.

"It is agreed, then. We are to have a children's party, and I may come. Won't the children be excited!"

"Torps, what are you going to do with them," asked the First Lieutenant, "besides breaking their necks by pushing them down the windsails?" He spoke without bitterness, but as a man who had in his youth embraced cynicism as a refuge and found the pose easier to retain than to discard.

The Torpedo Lieutenant regarded him severely. "It's no good adopting this tone of lofty detachment, Number One. *You're* going to do most of the entertaining, besides keeping my grey hairs company."

The First Lieutenant laughed, a sad, hard laugh without any laughter in it. "I don't amuse children, I'm afraid. In fact, I frighten them. They don't like my face. No, no——"

"Mr. Hornby," interposed the Skipper's Missus reproachfully, "that isn't quite true, is it? You know Jane prays for you nightly, and Corney wouldn't for worlds sleep without that wooden semaphore you made him——"

"I think Hornby would make an admirable Father Neptune," said the Captain, considering him mischievously, "with a tow wig and beard——"

"And my green bath kimono," supplemented the A.P. "I bought it at Nagasaki, in the bazaar. It's got green dragons all over it——" He met the First Lieutenant's eye and lapsed into silence again.

"Yes! Yes! And oyster-shells sewn all over it, and seaweed trailing . . ." The Skipper's Missus clapped her hands. "And distribute presents after tea. Oh, Mr. Hornby, *wouldn't* that be lovely!"

The First Lieutenant took no further part in the discussion. But late that night he was observed to select a volume of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" (L—N) from the wardroom library, and retire with it to his cabin. His classical education had been scanty, and left him in some doubt as to what might be expected of the son of Saturn and Rhea at a children's party.

2

"I DOUBT if any of 'em'll face it," said the First Lieutenant hopefully, when The Day arrived. "There's a nasty lop on, and the glass is tumbling down as if the bottom had dropped out. It's going to blow a hurricane before midnight. Anyhow, they'll all be sick coming off."

The Torpedo Lieutenant was descending the ladder to the picket-boat. "Bunje and I are going in to look after them. It's too late to put it off now." He glanced at the threatening horizon. "They'll be all snug once we get them on board, and this'll all blow over before tea-time."

Off went the steamboats, the Torpedo Lieutenant in the picket-boat and the India-rubber Man in the steam pinnace, and a tremor of excitement ran through the little cluster of children gathering at the jetty steps ashore.

"It's awfully rough outside the harbour," announced Cornelius James, submitting impatiently to his nurse's inexplicable manipulation of the muffler round his neck. "I'm never sick, though," he confided to a small and rather frightened-looking mite of a girl who clung to her nurse's hand and looked out to the distant ship with some trepidation in her blue eyes. "My daddy's a Captain," continued Cornelius James; "and I'm *never* sick—are you?"

She nodded her fair head. "Yeth," she lisped sadly.

"P'r'aps your daddy isn't a Captain," conceded Cornelius James magnificently.

The maiden shook her head. "My daddy's an Admiral," was the slightly disconcerting reply.

"I shall steer the boat," asserted Cornelius James presently, by way of restoring his shaken prestige.

"Oh, Corney, you can't," said Jane. "Casey always lets Georgie steer father's galley —you know he does. You're only saying that to show off."

"'M not," retorted Cornelius James. "I'm a boy : girls can't steer boats. 'Sides, Georgie'll be sick."

"Oh, I hope there'll be a band and dancing," said Georgina rapturously.

"That's all you girls think about," snorted a young gentleman of about her own age, with deep scorn. "*I* hope there'll be a shooting gallery, an' those ras'berry puffs with cream on top." . . . His eye followed the pitching steamboats, fast drawing near. "Anyhow, I hope there'll be a shooting gallery. . . . I say, it's rather rough, isn't it?"

The children, cloaked and muffled in their wraps, watched the boats buffet their way shoreward in clouds of spray. The parting injunctions of nurses and governesses fell on deaf ears.

How could anyone be expected to listen to prompted rigmaroles about "bread and butter before cake" and "don't forget to say thank you for asking me" with the prospect of this brave adventure drawing so near?

Georgina, standing on tip-toe with excitement, suddenly emitted a shrill squeal of emotion. "Oh! there's Mr. Mainwaring in the first boat!"

"Who's Mr. Mainwaring?" inquired a small girl with a white bow over one ear, secretly impressed by Georgina's obvious familiarity with the inspiring figure in the stern sheets of the picket-boat.

"*Dear* Mr. Mainwaring!" repeated Georgina under her breath, gazing rapturously at her idol.

White Bow repeated her query.

"He's—he's Mr. Mainwaring," replied Georgina. "My Mr. Mainwaring." Which is about as much information as any young woman may reasonably be expected to give another who betrays too lively an interest in her beloved.

The Torpedo Lieutenant waved his arm in a gesture of indiscriminate greeting, and the children responded with a fluttering of hands and dancing eyes. The steam pinnace was following hard in the wake of the picket-boat.

Jane, with the far-seeing eye of love, recog-

nised the occupant instantly. "There's Mr. Standish," she said. "*My* Mr. Standish!"

The nurse of Georgina, Jane, and Cornelius James turned to the Providence that brooded over a small boy with a freckled face. "Did you ever hear such children?" she asked in an aside. "*Her* Mr. Standish! That's the way they goes on all day!"

The other nodded. "Mine's like that, too; only it's our ship's Sergeant of Marines with him." Master Freckles's choice in the matter of an idol had evidently not lacked the wise guidance of his nurse.

The boats swung alongside in the calm waters of the basin. The Torpedo Lieutenant handed his freight of frills and furbelows to the Coxswain's outstretched arms. The small boys to a man disdained the helping hand, but scrambled with fine independence into the stern sheets.

"Sit still a minute." The Indiarubber Man counted. ". . . Eight—twelve! Hallo! Six absentees—— No, Corney, you can't steer, because I'm going to clap you all below hatches the moment we get outside." He raised his voice, hailing the picket-boat. "All right, Torps?" The Torpedo Lieutenant signified that they were all aboard the lugger, and off they went.

The nurses assembled on the end of the jetty waved their handkerchiefs with valedictory ges-

tures; the wind caught their shrill farewells and tossed them contemptuously to where the gulls wheeled far overhead.

"My! Isn't it blowing!" said the small boy in freckles, indifferent to his nurse's lamentations of farewell. "Look at Nannie's skirts, like a balloon. . . ."

"Yes," agreed the Torpedo Lieutenant gravely. "It's what's called a typhoon. I've only seen one worse, and that was the day I sailed in pursuit of Bill Blubbernose, the Bargee Buccaneer."

Georgina cast him a glance of passionate credence.

"Oh!" gasped Freckles, "have you really chased pirates?" The Torpedo Lieutenant nodded. A certain three weeks spent in an open cutter off the coast of Zanzibar as a midshipman still remained a vivid recollection.

"Tell us about it," said the children, and snuggled closer into the shelter of the Torpedo Lieutenant's long arms.

The steamboats drew near the ship, and in the reeling stern-sheets of the steam-pinnace the Indiarubber Man stood holding two small figures by the collars—two small figures whose heads projected far beyond the lee gunwale. They were Cornelius James and the young gentleman whose valiant soul had yearned for shooting galleries and eke raspberry puffs. And, horror of horrors! the little girls were laughing.

The picket-boat had no casualties to report, and as she went plunging alongside, the Junior Watchkeeper (in sea-boots at the bottom of the ladder) heard the Torpedo Lieutenant say:

"We cut their noses off and nailed them to the flying jibboom."

"And what happened then?" gasped the enthralled Freckles as he was picked up and hoisted over the rail on to the spray-splashed ladder.

"And they all lived happily ever afterwards," murmured the Torpedo Lieutenant absently. "Come on, who's next? One, two, three—on the next wave. *Hup* you go!"

At the top of the ladder to greet each small guest stood the mother of Georgina, Jane, and Cornelius James. She had lunched on board with her husband and had spent the early part of the afternoon fashioning a garment for Father Neptune—

> "That the feast might be more joyous,
> That the time might pass more gaily,
> And the guests be more contented,"

quoted the First Lieutenant with his twisted smile, as he tried it on.

The quarterdeck had been closed in with an awning and side curtains of canvas that made all within as snug as any nursery. The deck had been dusted with French chalk; bright-coloured flags draped the canvas walls; the band was whimpering to start.

Cornelius James and his fellow sufferer were not long in recovering from their indisposition; a glass of milk and biscuits soon restored matters to the normal, and together they sallied forth to sample the joys that had been prepared for them.

There were windsails stretched from the after-bridge to mattresses on the quarter-deck, down which one shot through the dizzy darkness to end in a delicious "wump" at the bottom. The after-capstan was a roundabout, with its squealing passengers suspended from capstan-bars. Each grim twelve-inch gun had a saddle strapped round the muzzle, on which one sat, thrilled and ecstatic, while the great guns rose slowly to extreme elevation and descended again to mundane levels.

There were pennies for the venturesome, to be extracted at great personal risk from an electric dip; in a dark casemate a green light shivered in a little glass tube; you placed your hand in front of it, and on a white screen a skeleton hand appeared in a manner at once ghostly and delightful. Cornelius James returned to the quarter-deck as one who had brushed elbows with the Black Arts. "But I wish I could see right froo my own tummy," he confided, sighing, to the First Lieutenant.

The First Lieutenant, however, was rather *distrait;* he glanced constantly upwards at the bellying awning overhead and then walked to the gangway to look out upon the tumbling grey

sea and lowering sky. Once or twice he conferred with a distinguished-looking gentleman who had not joined in the revels, but, carrying a telescope and wearing a sword-belt, remained aloof with a rather worried expression. This was the Officer of the Watch.

"We'll furl it while they're having tea," said the First Lieutenant. "But how the deuce they're going to get ashore the Lord knows. I'll have to hoist in the boats if it gets any worse. Keep an eye on the compass and see we aren't dragging." The Captain came across the deck.

"You must furl the awning, Hornby; we're in for a blow." He looked round regretfully at the laughing throng of youngsters.

"Yes, sir. And I think we ought to send the children ashore while there's still time." As he spoke a wave struck the bottom of the accommodation ladder and broke in a great cloud of spray.

"Too late now, I'm afraid. They'll have to stay till it moderates. The wind has backed suddenly. Get steam on the boat-hoist and hoist in the boats. You'd better top-up the ladders. Pretty kettle of fish, with my wife and all these children on board."

3

Tea had passed into the limbo of things enjoyed, if not forgotten, and the guests had gathered in

the after-cabin. "Children!" cried the mother of Georgina, Jane, and Cornelius James, "a visitor has come on board to see you!" As she spoke, a gaunt apparition appeared in the doorway. He wore a gilt paper crown, and was dressed in a robe of the brightest green. Seaweed hung in festoons from his head and shoulders, oyster-shells clashed as he walked; in one hand he carried a trident, and on his back a heavy pannier. His legs were encased in mighty boots, a shaggy beard hung down over his chest; his eyes, sombre and unsmiling, roved over the assembled children.

There was a sudden silence: then the small girl with the white bow over one ear burst into tears. "Boo-hoo!" she cried. "Don't like nasty man," and ran to bury her face in her hostess's gown. Her fears were infectious, and symptoms of a general panic ensued. "I knew it," mumbled the visitor despairingly into his beard, "I *knew* this would happen."

"Children, children, don't be silly—it's only Father Neptune. He's got presents for you all. Won't you go and say how d'you do to him! He's come all the way from the bottom of the sea."

Cornelius James pulled himself together and advanced with outstretched hand, as befitted the son of a post-captain on board his father's ship. "I know who you are," he asserted stoutly. "You're Father Christmas's brother!"

The First Lieutenant hastily accepted this new mythology. "Quite right," he replied with gratitude, "quite right!" Then, as if realising that something further was required of him, added in a deep bass voice:

"*Fee! Fi! Fo! Fum!*"

White Bow screamed, and even Cornelius James the valiant fell back a pace. Matters were beginning to look serious, when the Torpedo Lieutenant appeared, rather out of breath. "Sorry we had to rush away just now, but we had to furl the awning——" His quick eye took in the situation at a glance.

"Hallo! old chap," he cried, and smote the dejected Father Neptune on the back. "I *am* delighted to see you! How are all the mermaids and flying-fish? Bless my soul! what have you got in this pannier—dolls . . . lead soldiers, air-guns! I *say*——"

The children rallied round him as the children of another age must have rallied round Saint George of England.

"Don't like nasty old man," repeated White Bow, considering the First Lieutenant with dewy eyes. "Nasty cross old man." The visitor from the bottom of the sea fumbled irresolutely with his trident.

"Is it really Father Christmas's own brother?" queried a small sceptic, advancing warily.

"Of course it is! Look here, look at all the

things he's brought you," and in an undertone to the First Lieutenant, "Buck up, Number One, don't look so frightened!" They unslung the pannier and commenced to unpack the contents; the children gathered round with slowly returning confidence, and by twos and threes the remainder of the hosts returned from the upper-deck.

"Why aren't they all wet if they've come from the bottom of the sea?" demanded Freckles the materialist. "Why isn't Father Christmas's brother wet?"

They looked round in vain. Father Christmas's brother had vanished.

At that moment the Captain entered and sought his wife's eye. For a few moments they conferred in an undertone; then she laughed, that clear confident laugh of hers with which they had shared so many of life's perplexities.

"Children!" she cried, "listen! Here's an adventure! We've all got to sleep on board to-night!"

"Oh, mummie!" gasped Georgina with rapture, "how *lovely!*" This *was* a party, and no mistake. "Can I sleep in Mr. Mainwaring's cabin?"

"And can I sleep in Mr. Standish's cabin?" echoed Jane earnestly. "And we needn't go to bed for hours and hours, need we?" chimed in Cornelius James.

"Where are they to sleep?" asked the Cap-

tain's wife, turning to the Torpedo Lieutenant with laughter still in her eyes. "I never thought of that. One always has spare rooms in a house, but a battleship is so different. . . ."

"It's all right," he replied. "I've arranged all that. There are a lot of people ashore: the children can use their cabins, and some of us can sling in cots for the night. They'll have to wear our pyjamas. . . . But I don't know about baths——"

"I think they must have plenary absolution from the tub to-night." She glanced at the tiny watch at her wrist. "Now then, children, half an hour before bed time: one good romp. What shall we play?"

"Oranges and lemons," said Georgina promptly, and seized the Indiarubber Man's hand.

"I don't know the words," replied her partner plaintively; "I only 'knows the toon,'" as the leadsman said to the Navigator.

So the children supplied the words to the men's bass accompaniment; the Captain and his wife linked hands. The candle came to light them to bed; the chopper came to chop off a head; and at the end a grand tug-of-war terminated with two squealing heaps of humanity in miniature subsiding on top of the Young Doctor and the A.P.

Then they played "Hunt the slipper," at which Torps, with his long arms, greatly distin-

guished himself, and "Hide the Thimble," at which Double-O Gerrard, blinking through his glasses straight at the quarry without seeing it, was hopelessly disgraced. "General Post" and "Kiss in the Ring" followed, and quite suddenly the mother of Georgina, Jane, and Cornelius James decreed it was time for bed, and the best game of all began.

The Captain's wife gathered six pairs of vasty pyjamas over her arm. "I'll take the girls all together and look after them in my husband's cabin," she said. "We'll come along when we're ready. Will you all look after the boys?"

Freckles fell to the lot of the Junior Watchkeeper; David, specialist in raspberry puffs, had already attached himself to the Indiarubber Man. The A.P. found himself leading off a young gentleman with an air-gun which he earnestly desired as a bed-fellow. The remaining two, red-headed twins who had spent most of the afternoon locked in combat, were in charge of Torps and the Young Doctor.

"Where's Cornelius James?" asked the First Lieutenant suddenly. "What a day, what a day!" A search party was promptly instituted, and the Captain's son at last discovered forward in the Petty Officers' mess. Here, seated on the knee of Casey, his father's coxswain, he was being regaled with morsels of bloater, levered into his willing mouth on the

point of a clasp knife, and washed down by copious draughts of strong tea out of a basin.

"I went to say 'Good night' to Casey," explained the delinquent as he was being led back to civilisation, "and Casey said I ought to be hungry after mustering my bag this afternoon. What does that mean?"

"I shouldn't listen to everything Casey tells you," replied the First Lieutenant severely.

"That's what daddy says sometimes," observed Cornelius James. "But I like Casey awfully. Better'n Nannie. He taught me how to make a reef-knot, an' I can do semaphore—the whole alphabet . . . nearly."

"Here we are," interrupted his harassed mentor, stopping before the door of his cabin. "This is where you've got to sleep." He lifted his small charge on to the bunk. "Now then, let's get these shoes off. . . ."

The flat echoed with the voices of children and the sounds of expostulation. The Marine sentry (specially selected for the post "on account of 'im 'avin' a way with children," as the Sergeant-Major had previously explained to the First Lieutenant) drifted to and fro on his beat with a smile of ecstatic enjoyment on his faithful R.M.L.I. features. For some moments he hovered outside the Junior Watchkeeper's cabin. There were indications in the conversation drifting out through the curtained doorway that all was not well within. At length Private

Phillips could contain himself no longer. "Better let me do it, sir. Bein' a married man, sir, I knows the routine, in a manner o' speakin' . . ." he said, and plunged into the fray.

"Oh, is that you, Phillips?" the relieved voice of the Junior Watchkeeper was heard to say. "I can't get the lead of this infernal rice-string—don't wriggle, Jim—it's rove so taut. . . ."

"What *'normous* pyjamas," said Cornelius James, suffering himself to be robed in his night-attire. The operation was conducted with some difficulty because of the sheathed sword which the visitor had found in a corner of his host's cabin and refused thereafter to be parted from. "Have you ever killed anyone with this sword?" A blustering sea broke against the ship's side and splashed the glass of the scuttle with spray. "Hark at the waves outside! Can't I have the window open? Shall I say my prayers to you?"

"No," replied the First Lieutenant, with a little wry smile, as the shadow-fingers of the might-have-been tightened momentarily round his heart. "No, I think you'd better wait till Mummie comes." Shrill voices and peals of laughter sounded outside. "Here she is now."

He stepped outside, and met the mother of Georgina, Jane, and Cornelius James at the head of her flock.

"Here we are," she exclaimed, laughing.

"But, oh, Mr. Hornby, our pyjamas are so *huge!*"

"So are ours," said the First Lieutenant, and stooped to gather into his arms a pathetic object whose pyjama coat of many colours almost trailed along the deck. "Cornelius James wants you to go and hear him say his prayers. . . . I will find sleeping quarters for this one."

Ten minutes later the last child had been swung into its unaccustomed sleeping quarters; the twins in adjacent cabins had ceased to hurl shrill defiance at each other; and silence brooded over the flat. By the dim light of the police-lamp Private Phillips paced noiselessly up and down on his beat, and the mother of Georgina, Jane, and Cornelius James passed softly from cabin to cabin in that gentle meditation mothers play at bedtime.

On her way aft to the after-cabin she met the Torpedo Lieutenant. "The children all want to say 'Good night' to you," she said softly. "Only don't stay long. They are so excited, and they'll never go to sleep." Of all the men on board the Torpedo Lieutenant's heart was perhaps nearest that of a child. He tiptoed into the cabin-flat and drew the curtain of the nearest cabin.

"Who's in here?"

"Me," said a small voice. Torps approached the bunk. "Who's 'me'—Georgina?"

"Yes. Good night, Mr. Mainwaring."

"Good night, shrimp," replied her idol, submitting to the valediction of two skinny arms twined tightly round his neck. "Good night, and sweet dreams. . . . No, I can't tell you stories to-night; it's much too late. . . . Lie down and go to sleep."

In the next cabin, the sound of deep breathing showed that the small occupant had passed into dreamland. It was Freckles. Jane remained awake long enough to kiss his left eyebrow and was asleep the next instant. White Bow also was asleep, and nearly all the remainder drowsy. Cornelius James, clasping the First Lieutenant's sword, however, remained wide-eyed. "I'm so firsty," he complained plaintively.

"That's called Nemesis, my son," said Torps, and gave him to drink out of the water-bottle. "Fank you," said Cornelius James, and sighed, as children and dogs do after drinking.

"Good night, Corney. . . . Now you must go to sleep and dream of bloaters. Oh, aren't you really sleepy? Well, if you shut your eyes tight perhaps the dustman won't see you," and switched out the light. As he was leaving a drowsy voice again spoke out of the darkness.

"What did the Buccaneer say when you nailed his nose to the flying jibboom?"

"Please make me a good boy," replied Torps, somewhat at random.

"Oh, same's I do," said Cornelius James.

"More or less; isn't that sword very uncomfortable?"

But no answer came back, for Cornelius James, the hilt of the sword grasped firmly in two small hands, had passed into the Valhalla of Childhood.

VIII

THE MUMMERS

THE sun had not long set, and its afterglow bathed the bay in pink light. It was a land-locked harbour, and the surface of the water held the reflections of the anchored Battle-fleet mirrored to its smallest detail. So still was the evening that sounds travelled across the water with peculiar acute distinctness.

On the quarter-deck of the end ship of the lee line a thousand men were trying to talk in undertones, lighting and relighting pipes, rallying their friends on distant points of vantage, and humming tunes under their breath. The resultant sound was very much like what you would hear if you placed your ear against a bee-hive on a summer day, only magnified a million-fold.

The ship's company of a super-Dreadnought, and as many men from other ships as could be accommodated on board, were gathered on the foremost part of the quarter-deck, facing aft. They sat in rows on mess stools, they were perched astride the after-turret guns, on the shields of the turrets, clinging to rails, stan-

chions and superstructure, tier above tier of men clad in night-clothing—that is to say, in blue jumper and trousers, with the white V of the flannel showing up each seaman's bronzed neck and face. Seamen and marines all wore their caps tilted comfortably on the backs of their heads, as is the custom of men of H.M. Navy enjoying their leisure. Above them all the smoke from a thousand pipes and cigarettes trembled in a blue haze on the still air of a summer evening.

They were there to witness an impromptu sing-song—a scratch affair organised at short notice to provide mirth and recreation for a ship's company badly in need of both. It was a ship's company hungry for laughter after endless months of watching and waiting for an enemy that was biding his time. Their lungs ached for a rousing, full-throated chorus ("*All* together, lads!"). They were simply spoiling to be the most appreciative audience in the world.

On the after-part of the quarter-deck a stage had been hurriedly constructed—a rude affair of planks and spars that could be disposed of in a very few moments if necessity arose—that supported a piano. A canvas screen, stretched between two stanchions behind the stage, did duty as scenery, and afforded the performers a "green-room"—for, of all the ritual connected with appearing upon a stage, the business of

"making-up" lies nearest to the sailor's heart. Provide him with a lavish supply of grease-paint, wigs, and the contents of the chaplain's or the officer of his division's wardrobe, and the success or otherwise of his turn, when it ultimately comes, matters little to the sailor-man. He has had his hour.

In front of the stage, a little in advance of the men, rows of chairs and benches provided sitting accommodation for the officers. They came up from dinner, lighting pipes and cigars, a full muster from Wardroom, Gunroom and Warrant Officers' Mess. The Captain came last, and his appearance was the signal for a great outburst of cheering from the closely packed audience. They had been waiting for this moment. It gave them an opportunity of relieving their pent-up feelings; it also gave them a chance to show the rest of the Fleet their attitude towards this Captain of theirs.

It was something they were rather proud that the rest of the Fleet should see.

Moreover, the rest of the Fleet, leaning over the forecastle rails and smoking its evening pipe, did see, and was none the worse for it.

A man might have been excused if he betrayed some self-consciousness at finding himself thus suddenly the cynosure of a thousand odd pair of eyes whose owners were doing their best to show him, after their fashion, that they

thought him an uncommonly fine fellow. The atmosphere was electrical with this abrupt, boyish ebullition of feeling. Yet the Captain's face, as he took his seat, was as composed as if he were alone in the middle of his own wide moors. He lit a pipe and nodded to the Commander beside him to signify that as far as he was concerned the show could start as soon as they liked.

All happy ships own a sing-song party of some sort or another. It may be that the singers are content to sit pipe in mouth in the lee of a gunshield and croon in harmony as the dusk settles down on a day's work done. Other ships' companies are more ambitious; the canteen provides a property-box, and from a flag-decked stage the chosen performers declaim and clog-dance with all the circumstance of the drama.

In days of piping peace, the Operatic and Dramatic Company of this particular ship had known many vicissitudes. Under the guidance of a musically inclined Ship's Steward, it had faced audiences across impromptu footlights as "The Pale Pink Pierrots," and, as such, had achieved a meteoric distinction. But unhappily the Ship's Steward was partial to oysters, and bought a barrelful at an auction sale ashore. On the face of things, it appeared a bargain; but the Ship's Steward neglected to inquire too closely into the antecedents of its

contents, and was duly wafted to other spheres of usefulness.

The Chaplain, an earnest man but tone-deaf, rallied the leaderless troupe of musicians. During the period of his directorship they were known to fame as "The Musical Coons." Musical in that each one wielded a musical instrument with which he made bold to claim acquaintance, Coons because they blacked their faces with burnt cork and had "corner-men." The corner-men were the weak spots in an otherwise well-planned organisation.

A sailor can be trusted with the integrity of a messmate's honour or the resources of the mint, conceivably with the key of a brewery cellar, and justify the confidence reposed in him. But he cannot be trusted to be a corner-man, "gagging" with a black face and a pair of bones. The Musical Coons dissolved after one performance, during which the Captain's brow grew black and the Chaplain turned faint, and an ecstatic ship's company shouted itself hoarse with delirious enjoyment.

Thereafter, for a period, the breath of rebuke and disrepute clung to the songsters; but a ship without a sing-song party is like a dog without a tail. A committee of Petty Officers waited upon the First Lieutenant, as men once proffered Cromwell the Protectorship of England, lest a worse thing befell them. The First Lieutenant, with a reluctance and a full sense of

the responsibilities involved, that was also Cromwellian, finally consented to become the titular head of the sing-song party.

He it was, then, who rose from his chair, holding a slip of paper, and faced the great bank of faces with one hand raised to enjoin silence. The cheering redoubled.

For perhaps fifteen seconds he stood with raised hand, then he lowered it and the smile left his eyes. His brows lowered too. The cheering wavered, faltered, died away. They knew what Number One meant when he looked like that.

"The first item on the programme," he said in his clear voice, "is a song by Petty Officer Dawson, entitled, 'The Fireman's Daughter,'" and sat down again amid loud applause.

The A.P. rose, hopped on to the stage, and sat down at the piano that occupied one wing of the stage. Petty Officer Dawson, who was also the ship's painter, emerged from behind the canvas screen, coyly wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. The piano tinkled out the opening bars of the song, and the concert began.

It was a sad song; the very first verse found the fireman's daughter on her death-bed. But the tune was familiar and pleasantly mournful, and, as the piano thumped the opening bars of the refrain for the second time, the hundreds of waiting men took it up readily. The melody

swelled and rose, till the sadness of the theme was somehow overwhelmed by the sadness that is in the harmony of men's voices singing in the open air.

Petty Officer Dawson was a stout man addicted in daily life to the inexplicable habit of drying his gold-leaf brush in the few wisps of hair Nature had left him with. His rôle on the occasion of a concert was usually confined to painting the scenery. The nation being at war, and this particular concert held during the effective blockade of an enemy's empire, scenery was out of the question. So, as one of the recognised members of the sing-song party, he sang—with, be it added, considerable effect.

"The next item," announced the First Lieutenant (who knew his audience better even than they knew him), "is a comic song entitled, 'Hold tight, Emma!' by Stoker Williams."

This was "Taff" Williams, Stoker First-class, comedian tenth-class, and master of patter unintelligible (mercifully so, perhaps) to any but a bluejacket audience. He was a wisp of a man with a pale, beardless face and small features; incidentally, too, the scrum half of the ship's Rugby team and the referee's terror.

But he was more than this: he was the ship's wag, and so was greeted with shouts and whistles of approval as he stepped on to the stage attired in the burlesque counterfeit of an airman's costume.

Perhaps you might not have thought his song so very funny after all. It might even have struck you as vulgar, since it depended for its humour upon gorgonzola cheese, the eldest son of the German Emperor, *mal-de-mer*, and a number of other things not considered amusing in polite society. But the sailor's susceptibilities are peculiar: they were there to enjoy themselves, and again and again a great gust of laughter swept over the audience as an autumn gale convulses the trees on the outskirts of a forest. The singer's topical allusions, sly incomprehensibilities, he flung about him like bombs that burst in an unfailing roar of delight among his shipmates. No wonder they liked him; and even the padre, who perforce had to knit his brows once or twice, looked regretful when the last encore was over.

Taff Williams's song was succeeded by a duet. The singers were also comedians, but of a different calibre. Some odd freak of Nature had fashioned them both astoundingly alike in face and frame. They were baldish men, short and sturdy, with sandy eyebrows and lashes of so light a colour as to be almost invisible. Their countenances were round and expressionless, and their song, which was called "We are the Brothers Boo-Hoo!" contained little beyond reiterations of the fact, interspersed with "steps" of a solemn and intricate nature.

Ordinarily their avocations and walks in life

were separated by a wide gulf. One was a Petty Officer and L.T.O., the other a stoker. But Fame recognises no distinctions of class or calling, and circumstances over which they had little control, the universal decree of the ship's company in short, drove them on to the stage to face successive audiences side by side as The Brothers Boo-Hoo. Neither dreamed of appearing there without the other, although off it, save for a few grave rehearsals, they rarely met. They were not vocalists, but they bowed to popular demand, preserving their stolid, immobile demeanours, and sang in accents sternly and unintelligibly Gaelic.

Their turn over, the First Lieutenant announced a juggling display by Boy Buggins. Boy Buggins appeared, very spick and span in a brand new suit of Number Threes, and proceeded to juggle with canteen eggs, Indian clubs and mess crockery (while the caterer of his mess held his breath to the verge of apoplexy) in a manner quite bewildering.

The Captain took his pipe out of his mouth and leaned towards the Commander. "Where did the lad pick up these antics?" he inquired, smiling.

The Commander shook his head. "I don't know, sir. Probably in a circus."

As a matter of fact, Boy Buggins did start life (as far as his memory carried him) in grubby pink tights and spangles. But he followed in

the train of no circus; it was in front of public-houses in a district of London where such pitches recurred with dreary frequency that he cut capers on a strip of carpet. He visited them nightly in the company of a stalwart individual who also wore pink tights. After each performance the stalwart one ordained an interval for refreshment. On good days he used to reach home very much refreshed indeed.

They called it home (it was a cellar) because they slept there; and as often as not a thin woman with tragic eyes was there waiting for them. She used to hold out her hand with a timid, shamed gesture, and there was money in it which the man took. If he had had a good day or she a bad one—it was always one or the other—the stalwart one beat the woman, or, in his own phraseology, "put it acrost" her. But ultimately he had one good day too many, or else he felt unusually stalwart, for the woman lay motionless in the corner of the cellar where she was flung, and wouldn't answer when he had finished kicking her.

The police took the stalwart one away to swing for it, and "the parish" took the thin woman away in a deal box. Boy Buggins passed, via an industrial training ship, into the Royal Navy, and earned the Distinguished Conduct Medal before this particular sing-song had passed out of the minds of those who were present at it.

One must conclude that all these things were, as the Arabs say, on his forehead.

"Private Mason, R.M.L.I.—Concertina Solo!"

A great burst of laughter and cheering broke out from the sailors, and redoubled as a private of Marines, holding a concertina in his gnarled fists, walked on to the stage. Even the officers put their hands up to smile behind them; one or two nearest the First Lieutenant leaned over and patted him on the back as if he had achieved something.

The whole audience, officers and men, were evidently revelling in some tremendous secret reminiscence conjured up by the appearance of this private of Marines. Yet, as he stood there, fingering the keys of his instrument, waiting for the uproar to subside, there was little about him to suggest high humour. He was just a thin, rather delicate-looking man with a grizzled moustache and dreamy eyes fixed on vacancy. His claim to notoriety, alas, lay in more than his incomparable music. Human nature at its best is a frail thing. But human nature, as typified by Private Mason, was very frail. Apart from his failing he was a valuable asset to the sing-song party; but, unhappily, it required all the resources and ingenuity of its promoters to keep Private Mason sober on the night of an entertainment.

When and how he acquired the wherewithal

to wreck the high hopes of the reigning stage manager was a mystery known to him alone. His messmates drained their tots at dinner with conscientious thoroughness, and his into the bargain, striving together less in the cause of temperance than from a desire that he should for once do himself and his concertina (of which he was a master) justice.

Yet, his turn announced, on the last occasion of a concert before the war, the curtain rose upon an empty stage. The Carpenter's party happened upon him, as archæologists might excavate a Sleeping Bacchus or a recumbent Budda, in the process of dismantling the stage. Private Mason was underneath it, breathing stertorously, a smile of beatific contentment on his worn features, his head pillowed on his concertina.

The Fleet Surgeon subsequently missed a large-sized bottle of eau-de-Cologne from his cabin, which he was bringing home from Gibraltar as a present for his wife. The discovery of the loss assisted him in his diagnosis of the case.

Silence fell on the audience at length, and the concertina solo began. As has been indicated, Private Mason could play the concertina. In his rather tremulous hands it was no longer an affair of leather and wood (or of whatever material concertinas are constructed), but a living thing that laughed and sobbed and

shook your soul like the Keening. It became a yearning, passionate, exultant daughter of Music that somehow wasn't quite respectable.

And when he had finished, and passed his hand across his moist forehead preparatory to retiring from the stage, they shouted for more.

"Church bells, Nobby!" cried a hundred voices. "Garn, do the church bells!" So he did the church bells, as the wind brings the sound across the valley on a summer evening at home, wringing his shipmates' sentimental heartstrings to the limit of their enjoyment.

"*Strewth!*" ejaculated a bearded member of the audience when the turn was over, relighting his pipe with a hand that shook. "I 'ear Nobby play that at the Canteen at Malta, time Comman'er-in-Chief an' 'is Staff was there—Comman'er-in-Chief, so 'elp me, 'e sob' like a woman. . . ."

The reminiscence may not have been in strict accordance with the truth, but, even considered in the light of fiction, it was a pretty testimony to Private Mason's art.

The last turn of the evening came an hour later when the slightly embarrassed Junior Watchkeeper stepped on to the stage. His appearance was the signal for another great outburst of enthusiasm from the men. He was not perhaps more of a favourite with them than any of his brethren seated on the chairs below; but he was an officer, obviously not at ease on a

concert stage, only anxious to do his bit towards making the evening a success. They realised it on the instant, with the readiness of seamen to meet their officers half-way when the latter are doing something they evidently dislike to help the common weal. They knew the Junior Watchkeeper didn't want to sing, and they cared little what he sang about, but they cheered him with full-throated affection as he stood gravely facing them, waiting for a lull.

It is just this spirit, of which so much has been imperfectly conveyed to the layman—is, in fact, not comprehended in its entity by outsiders—which is called for want of a better term "sympathy between officers and men." It is a bond of mutual generosity and loyalty, strong as steel, more formidable to an enemy than armaments; strengthened by monotony and a common vigil, it thrives on hardships shared, and endures triumphant, as countless tales shall tell, down to the gates of Death.

The Junior Watchkeeper's song was an old one—one that had stirred the hearts of sailors no longer even memories with his audience. He sang simply and tunefully in the strong voice of one who knew how to pitch an order in the open air. When it was finished, he acknowledged the tumultuous applause by a stiff little bow and retreated, flushing slightly. The sing-song was over.

The officers were rising from their chairs,

the A.P. at the piano was looking towards the Commander for permission to crash out the opening bars of the Anthem that would swing the audience as one man to its feet. At that moment a Signalman threaded his way through the chairs and saluted the Captain.

The latter took the signal-pad extended to him, and read the message. Then he turned abruptly to the audience, his hand raised to command silence. The last of the warm glow that lingered long in the northern summer twilight lit his strong, fine face as he faced his men. There was a great hush of expectancy.

"Before we pipe down," he said, "I want to read you a message that has just come from the Commander-in-Chief. 'One of our destroyers engaged and sank by gunfire two of the enemy's destroyers this afternoon.'"

A great roar of cheering greeted the curt message. The listening fleet took it up, and in the stillness of the land-locked harbour the volume of sound reverberated, savagely and triumphantly exultant.

The hills ashore caught the echo and tossed it sleepily to and fro.

Then, flushed with excitement and hoarse with shouting, they sang the National Anthem to a close.

Altogether, it was a very noisy evening.

IX

CHUMMY-SHIPS

The Lieutenant for Physical Training Duties came down into the Wardroom and sank into the one remaining arm-chair.

"I must say," he ejaculated, "the sailor is a cheerful animal. Umpteen days steaming on end without seeing any enemy—just trailing the tail of our coat about the North Sea—we come into harbour and we invite the matelots to lie on their backs on the upper-deck (minus cap and jumper) and wave their legs in the air by way of recreation. They comply with the utmost good humour. They don't believe that it does them the smallest good, but they know I get half-a-crown a day for watching them do it, and they go through with it like a lot of portly gentlemen playing 'bears' to amuse their nephews."

The Indiarubber Man broke off and surveyed his messmates with a whimsical grey eye. The majority were assimilating the contents of illustrated weeklies over a fortnight old; two in opposite corners of the settee were asleep with their caps tilted over their noses, sleeping the

sleep of profound exhaustion. One member of the mess was amusing himself with a dice-box at the table, murmuring to himself as he rattled and threw.

The Indiarubber Man, in no wise irritated at the general lack of interest in his conversation, wriggled lower in his arm-chair till he appeared to be resting on the flat of his shoulder-blades, with his chin buried in the lappels of his monkey-jacket. "I maintain," his amiable monologue continued, "that there's something rather touching about the way they flap their arms about and hop backwards and forwards, and 'span-bend' and agonise themselves with such unfailing good humour—don't you think so, Pills?"

The Young Doctor gathered the dice again, knitting his brows. ". . . Seventy-seven, seventy-eight—that's seventy-eight times I've thrown these infernal dice without five aces turning up. And twenty-three times before breakfast. How much is seventy-eight and twenty-three? Three and eight's eleven, put down one and carry one—I beg pardon, I wasn't listening to you. Did you ask me a question?"

"I was telling you about the sailors chucking stunts on the quarter-deck."

"I don't want to hear about the sailors: they make me tired. There isn't a sick man on board except one I've persuaded to malinger to keep me out of mischief. They're the healthiest

collection of human beings I've ever met in my life."

"That's me," retorted the Indiarubber Man modestly. "*I* am responsible for their glowing health. They haven't been ashore for—how long is it?"

"Ten years it feels like," said someone who was examining the pictorial advertisements of an illustrated paper with absorbed interest.

"Quite. They haven't had a run ashore for ten years—ever since the war started, in fact; and yet, thanks to the beneficial effects of physical training, as laid down in the book of the words, and administered by the underpaid Lieutenant for Physical Training Duties, the Young Doctor is enabled to sit in the mess all day and see how often he can throw five aces. In short, he becomes a world's worker."

"It's just *because* they haven't been ashore for weeks and months, and in spite of the Lieutenant for Physical Training—och! No, Bunje, don't start scrapping—it's too early in the morning, and we'll wake . . . those . . . poor devils—— Eugh! Poof! There! What did I tell you!"

The two swaying figures, after a few preliminary cannons off sideboard, arm-chair and deck stanchion, finally collapsed on to the settee. The sleepers awakened with disgust.

"Confound you, Bunje, you clumsy clown!" roared one. Between them they

seized the Young Doctor, who was a small man, and deposited him on the deck. "Couldn't you see I was asleep, Pills?" demanded the other hotly. "You've woken Peter, too. He's had —how many is it, Peter?—eight morning watches running. I've brooded over him like a Providence from the fore-top through each weary dawning, so I ought to know." He yawned drowsily. "Peter saw a horn of the crescent moon sticking out of a cloud this morning, and turned out the anti-aircraft guns' crews. Thought it was the bows of a Zeppelin. Skipper was rather peevish, wasn't he, Peter?"

The Junior Watchkeeper grunted and turned over on to his other side. "Well, you nearly opened fire on a northern diver in that flat calm at dawn the other morning." The speaker cocked a drowsy eye on the mess from under his cap-peak. "Silly ass vowed it was the periscope of an enemy's submarine coming to the surface."

"Truth is," said the Indiarubber Man, "your nerves are shattered. Pills, here's a job for you. Give the lads two-penn'orth of bromide and stop their wine and extras. In the meanwhile," he pulled a small book out of his pocket, "I have here a dainty *brochure*, entitled, '*Vox Humana*—Its Ascendancy over Mere Noise'—otherwise, 'Handbook for Physical Training.' I may say I was partly responsible for its production."

"I believe you, faith!" said the Fleet Surgeon bitterly, over the top of the B.M.J.

The Indiarubber Man wheeled round. "P.M.O.! That's not the tone in which to speak to your Little Ray of Sunshine. It lacked *joie de vivre*." The speaker beamed on the mess. "I think we are all getting a little mouldy, if you ask me. In short, we are not the bright boys we were when war broke out. Supposing now—I say supposing—we celebrated our return to harbour, and the fact that we haven't bumped a mine-field, by asking our chummy-ship to dinner to-night, and giving them a bit of a chuck-up! Which *is* our chummy-ship, by the way? Where's the *What Ho!* lying?" He walked to the scuttle and stuck his head out. "Blessed if I can tell t'other from which now we're all so beautifully disguised."

"We haven't got a chummy-ship," replied the A.P. "We don't want a chummy-ship. Nobody loves us. We hate each other with malignant hatred by reason of hobnailed livers."

"And if we had," interposed another Lieutenant gloomily, "they'd far rather stay on board their own rotten ship. They're probably getting used to their messman by now. The sudden change of diet might be fatal." The speaker turned to the Young Doctor. "Pills, what d'you get when you change your diet

sudden-like—scurvy, or something awful, don't you?"

"Hiccoughs." The Surgeon dragged his soul from the depths of a frayed *Winning Post* and looked up. His face brightened. "Why? Anyone here——"

"No, no, that's all right, my merry leech. Only Bunje wants to ask the *What Ho's* to dinner."

"Yes," interposed the Gunnery Lieutenant, with a sudden access of enthusiasm. "Let's ask 'em. Where's the Navy List?" He flung a tattered Navy List on the table and pored over it.

"Hear, hear!" chimed in the Engineer Lieutenant-Commander. "Let's be a band of brothers, an' all drinks down to the mess the whole evening."

The mess generally began to consider the project.

"Here's the Commander," said someone. "Casting vote from him! D'you mind if we ask the *What Ho's* to dinner, sir? We all feel we should be better, nobler men after a heart-to-heart talk with our chummy-ships."

"Ask anyone you like," replied the Commander, "as long as they don't ask me to dine with them in their ship by way of revenge."

"Carried!" exclaimed the Indiarubber Man. "'Commander, 'e sez, spoke very 'andsome!' I will now indite a brief note of invitation.

Bring me pens, ink and paper. *Apportez-moi l'encre, de mon cousin, aussi du poivre, du moutard et des legumes—point à la ligne!* I got a prize for French in the *Britannia.*"

Here the Fleet Surgeon said something in an undertone about a village idiot, and left the mess. As he went out the First Lieutenant entered with an apologetic mien which everyone appeared to recognise instinctively.

The Torpedo Lieutenant looked up from his book. "Oh, no, Number One, spare us for just one morning. I've got a headache already from listening to Bunje."

The A.P. threw himself into an attitude of supplication. "Number One, consider the awful consequences of your act before it's too late. Consider what it means. If you make the wardroom untenable, I shall have to sit in the office all the morning. I might even have to do some work!"

The First Lieutenant shook his head dourly. "The chipping party is going to start in the wardroom this morning. Paint's inches thick on the bulkheads, and a shell in here would start fires all over the place. Bunje, if you want to write letters you'd better go somewhere else and do it."

The Indiarubber Man thumped the blotting-paper on his freshly written sheets and looked up with his penholder between his teeth. "I've

finished, Number One. Admit your hired bravoes."

As he spoke an ear-splitting fusillade of hammering commenced outside. The steel bulkheads reverberated with blows that settled down to a persistent rain of sound, deafening, nerve-shattering.

"They've started outside," shouted the First Lieutenant.

A general exodus ensued, and the Indiarubber Man gathered his writing materials preparatory to departure. "I guessed they had," he was heard to say. "I thought I heard a sound as it might have been someone tapping on the bulkhead."

The watchkeepers asleep on the settee stirred in their sleep, frowned, and sank again into fathomless oblivion.

* * * * *

The Indiarubber Man entered the wardroom in company with the Paymaster as the corporal of the wardroom servants was putting the finishing touches to the dinner-table. They surveyed the apartment without enthusiasm.

"Considered as a banquet hall, I confess it does lack something," observed the former.

"There's a good deal of paint lacking from the bulkheads. Number One has had a field day and a half."

The other nodded. "In the words of the song:

'There's no carpet on the floor,
And no knocker on the door,
Oh, ours is a happy little home

Phillips, bring me the menu, and let's see if the messman has succeeded in being funny without being vulgar."

Corporal Phillips brought the menu with the air of one who connives at a felony. "Messman says, sir, it ain't all 'e'd like it to be, what with guests comin' and that. But I says to 'im, 'war is war,' I says, 'an' we can't expect eggs-on-meat *entrées*, same's if it was peace time.'"

"To-day's beautiful thought!" remarked the Indiarubber Man when the corporal had withdrawn. "Really, Phillips has a knack of disclosing great truths as if they were the lightest gossip."

The Engineer Commander came in, glancing at the clock. "Five minutes more and the *What Ho's* will be here. Bunje, my lad, you were responsible for this *entente*—have you any idea what we are going to do with them after dinner?"

"None," replied the Indiarubber Man; "none whatever. It will come to me sudden-like. I might dress up as a bogey, and frighten you all—or shall we try table-turning? Or we could dope their liquor and send them all back

insensible. Wouldn't that be true Oriental hospitality! They'd wake up to-morrow morning under the impression that they'd had the night of their lives."

The members of the mess began to collect round the fireplace with the funereal expressions customary whenever a mess-dinner is impending.

"Which of the *What Ho's* are coming?"

"Where're they going to sit?"

"Who asked them?"

"Why?"

"Are drinks going down to the mess?"

And then the door opened and the guests arrived, smiling, a little shy, as the naval officer is wont to be when he finds himself in a strange mess.

They were relieved of caps and cloaks, and, under the mellowing influence of sherry and bitters, began to settle down.

"Jolly good of you fellows to ask us to dinner," said the First Lieutenant, an officer with a smiling cherubic visage and a choleric blue eye. "We were getting a bit bored with our hooker. A fortnight of looking for *Der Tag* gets a bit wearisome. D'you think the devils are ever coming out?"

"We didn't want to ask you a bit, really," explained one of the hosts (the advantage of having a chummy-ship is that you can insult them in your own mess). "It's only a scheme

of Bunje's for drinking intoxicating liquor to excess at the expense of his messmates."

The guests grinned sympathetically. As a matter of fact, most of the company drank little else than water during those days of strain and vigil. Frequent references to indulgence might, therefore, be regarded as comic, in a sense.

"We thought of bringing our own chairs," added one, "in case you'd landed all your spare ones."

"Yes," chimed in a third politely. "We didn't expect to find such a wealth of furniture —it's like a Model Homes Exhibition. You should see our mess!"

The Gunnery Lieutenant made a gesture of deprecation. "The watchkeepers insist on keeping the settee to caulk on in the intervals of hogging in their cabins. The piano was retained for the benefit of the Young Doctor. He can play *Die Wacht am Rhein* with one finger—can't you, Pills?"

The Young Doctor beamed with simple pride. "My sister's German governess taught me when I was a kid," he explained. "We have it every night—it's the only tune I know."

"The sideboard is to support the empty glasses of the bridge-players after the Padre has put down one of his celebrated 'no-trumps' hands—we had to keep the sideboard. The arm-chair is for Number One to sit in and beat time while his funny party chip paint off the

bulkheads." The Gunnery Lieutenant looked round. "And so on, and so on—oh, the gramophone? Bunje bu'st all the records except three, and we're getting to know those rather well. But as you're a guest, old thing, would you like 'Tipperary,' Tosti's 'Good-bye,' or 'A Little Grey Home in the West'?"

The corporal of the wardroom servants interrupted these amenities with the announcement that dinner was ready, and a general move was made to the table.

Thereafter the conversation flowed evenly and generally. It was not confined to war. The men who make war, either afloat or ashore, do not talk about it over-much. There are others—even in this England of ours—by tradition better qualified to do the talking, in that they see most of the game. . . . On the whole, perhaps, more "shop" was discussed than would have been the case in peace-time, but for the most part it eddied round much the same subjects as Wardroom conversation always does, with the Indiarubber Man's Puck-like humour and gay mock-cynicism running through it like a whimsical pattern in an otherwise conventional design.

War had been their trade in theory from earliest youth. They were all on nodding terms with Death. Indeed, most of the men round the long table had looked him between the eyes already, and the obituary pages in the Navy List

had been a reminder, month by month, of others who had looked there too—and blinked, and closed their eyes—shipmates and fleetmates and familiar friends.

War was the Real Thing, that was all. There was nothing about it to obsess men's minds. You might say it was the manœuvres of 19— all over again, with the chance of "bumping a mine" thrown in, and also the glorious certainty of ultimately seeing a twelve-inch salvo pitch exactly where the long years of preparation ordained that it should.

A submarine specialist, whom the war caught doing exile in a "big ship," dominated the conversation for a while with lamentations that he was constrained to dwell in the Tents of Kedah. Two minutes of his talk having nearly convinced everyone that the sole *raison d'être* of the big ship was to be sunk by submarine attack, he and his theories passed into a conversational siding. The watchkeepers exchanged mutual condolences on the exasperating tactics of drift-net trawlers, notes on atmospheric conditions prevalent in the North Sea, methods of removing nocturnal cocoa-stains from the more vital portions of a chart, and other matters of interest to watchkeepers.

The Commander and the First Lieutenant of the *What Ho's* discussed the training of setters. The Young Doctor and his opposite number, and those near them, found interest

in morphia syringes, ventilation of distributing stations, and—a section of the talk whirling into a curious backwater—the smell of cooking prevalent in the entrance halls of Sheerness lodging-houses. . . .

The dinner went its course: they drank, sitting (as was their privilege and tradition), the King's health. Then the cigarettes went round, chairs turned a little sideways, the port circulated a second time. The conversation was no longer general. In pairs or by threes, according to taste, temperament or individual calling, the members of the mess and their guests settled down to a complacent enjoyment of the most pleasant half-hour in a battleship's long day.

Presently, while the bridge-table was being set out, the Indiarubber Man rose from the table, and, crossing to the piano, began to vamp lightly on the keys, humming under his breath. A chorus quickly gathered round. A battered Naval Song Book was propped up on the music-rest—more from habit than necessity, since the Indiarubber Man could not read a note of music and everybody knew the words of the time-honoured chanties. The pianist's repertoire was limited: half a dozen ding-dong chords did duty as accompaniment to "Bantry Bay," "John Peel," and "The Chinese Bumboatman" alike; but a dozen lusty voices supplied melody enough, the singers packed like herrings round

the piano, leaning over each other's shoulders, and singing with all the strength of their lungs.

They exhausted the favourites at length, and the player wheeled round on his stool.

"What about one of the guests for a song?"

"Yes, yes!" cried several voices. "Where's Number One? He's our Madame Patti. You ought to hear him sing '*We don't serve bread with one fish-ball!*' It's really worth it. But it takes a lot of port to get him started. How d'you feel about it, Number One?" They spoke with indulgent affection, as a nurse might persuade a bashful child to show off before company.

He of the choleric blue eye was still sitting at the table with one of his hosts. He turned in his chair, smiling grimly.

"What's that about me? I don't want to start scrapping in a strange mess, Snatcher, but if you really *are* looking for trouble——!"

"Don't mind us!" shouted the Indiarubber Man delightedly. "We'll put up a scrap for you in half a jiffy if you feel like a crumpled shirt-front!" He looked round the mess. "Wait till Flags and the Secretary come in from dinner with the Old Man, and we'll out the gilded Staff. They're good 'uns to scrap."

As he spoke the door opened, and the Flag Lieutenant came in, to be met by a volley of greetings.

"We of the cuddy," he began in a tone of

mincing severity, "are not pleased at the raucous uproar said to be coming from a mess of officers and gentlemen. We are pained. We come to lend our presence to what might otherwise develop into an unseemly brawl——" He helped himself to a walnut out of a dish on the sideboard. "Here comes my colleague the Secretary-bird. He, too, is more grieved than angry."

The Secretary entered warily, and intending combatants girded their loins for battle.

"Pouf!" he exclaimed. "What a fug!" And elevated his nose with a sniff. The Fiery Cross was out.

"Out Staff!" said the Indiarubber Man in a low voice. "Dogs of war! Out gilded popinjays!"

With a promptitude that hinted at long experience of internecine warfare, the newcomers embraced the first maxim of war: "If you must hit, hit first, hit hard, and keep on hitting."

Like a flash, the two members of the Personal Staff were on the Indiarubber Man. A chair went crashing, a broken glass tinkled on to the deck, to the accompaniment of protests from the Paymaster, and, before the mess could join battle, the Indiarubber Man hurtled through the doorway on to the aft-deck, to pitch at the feet of a delighted Marine sentry. By the rules of the game, once through the portals

of the mess there was no return until a truce was declared. The younger members of the mess rose to a man; for a moment the guests hung back. It is not in the best of form to scrap in a strange mess, except by express invitation.

"Come on!" shouted the Junior Watchkeeper. "Bite 'em in the stomach!" and flung himself upon the Secretary.

The guests waited for no second invitation. It was a battle royal, and the Indiarubber Man, interned on the aft-deck, yelped encouragement to his erstwhile conquerors because they were fighting valiantly against hopeless odds.

A Rugby International and a middle-weight boxer of some pretensions, although hampered by aiguillettes and outnumbered six to one, were not easily disposed of. But they were ultimately overpowered, and carried, puffing with exhaustion and helpless with laughter, over the debris of the bridge-table, gramophone and paper-rack, out through the doorway.

The mess, breathing heavily, adjusted its ties and collars and smoothed its dishevelled hair. The Flag Lieutenant and Secretary retired to their cabins for more extensive repairs. The bridge-table was set upon its legs once more, the scattered cards collected.

"Polo!" said the Indiarubber Man. "Let's play polo!"

"How d'you do that?" asked one of the ecstatic guests. At the bottom of his heart he

was also wondering why the greybeards of the mess stood all this tomfoolery without protest. He had never been shipmates with the Indiarubber Man.

The Indiarubber Man took an orange off the sideboard, a dessert-spoon out of a drawer, and straddled over the back of a chair. "Like this, d'you see? We generally play three a-side, but as there are six of you we'll play double sides." He tossed the orange on to the deck, and hopped his chair in pursuit, brandishing the dessert-spoon.

"That's a great game," said the First Lieutenant of the *What Ho!* and got him to horse. "Come on, our side, boot and saddle!"

As the game was about to start the door opened, and the Flag Lieutenant entered hurriedly. He carried a signal-pad in his hand, and there was that in his face that silenced the polo players and caused the bridge players to lay down their hands.

"Signal," he said curtly. "Raise steam for full speed. Prepare for immediate action on leaving harbour." And was gone.

Those who had immediate duties elsewhere stampeded out of the mess. Overhead there was a thud of feet and ropes ends and the shrilling of pipes as the watch fell in. A Midshipman thrust his head inside the door of the Wardroom. "Boat's alongside, sir!" he said, and vanished.

The First Lieutenant of the visitors flung his boat-cloak over his shoulders. "Well," he said, "we've had a topping evening. S'long, and thanks very much."

Their hosts helped the departing ones into their great-coats. "Not 't all," they murmured politely in return. "Sorry to break up a cheery evening. Let's hope they've really come out this time!"

The Indiarubber Man slid on to the music-stool again, put his foot on the soft pedal, lightly touched the familiar chords, and began humming under his breath:

"We don't want to lose you——
But we *think* you ought to go . . ."

There are many ways of saying *Morituri te saluto.*

X

THE HIGHER CLAIM

1

ALL night long the wind, blowing in across the dunes from the North Sea, had brought the sound of firing.

At times it was hardly perceptible: a faint reverberation of the ether that could scarcely be defined as sound; it would resolve itself into a low, continuous rumble, very much like distant thunder, that died away and recommenced nearer and more distinct. Then the sashes of the open window trembled, and Margaret, who had lain awake all night, every nerve strained to listen, leaned on one elbow to stare from her bed out into the darkness.

She had tried not to listen. For hours she had lain without moving, with limbs tense beneath the coverings, the palms of her hands pressed against her ears. But imagination sped through the dark passages of her mind, brandishing a torch, compelling her at length to listen again.

She had no very clear idea, of course, what

a naval action was like. A confused recollection of pictures seen in childhood only suggested stalwart men, stripped to the waist and barefooted, working round the smoking guns of ships whose decks blazed up in flame to taunt the quiet heavens; while the ships' scuppers ran red.

Modern naval warfare could be nothing like that, though.

She had only seen the results of modern warfare. Men tortured till they came near to forgetting their manhood; burnt, deaf, scalded, torn by splinters, blinded; she had seen them smiling under circumstances that thrilled her to feel they shared a common Flag.

On the outbreak of war the training institute on the East Coast, of which Margaret was the matron, had, on account of its position near the coast and other advantages, been converted into a Naval Hospital. Miss Dacre, the principal, Margaret, and a few others who had already qualified in nursing, were retained as Red Cross sisters, and it was not long before the classrooms and dormitories were occupied by very different inmates from those for whom they were intended. Only the more serious cases reached these wards. The less dangerously hurt passed by rail or hospital ship to the base hospitals in the South.

All night long the wounded men in the long wards stirred fretfully under the white counter-

panes, each man translating the sounds according to his own imagination or experience. The night-sisters moved softly to and fro on the beeswaxed boards, smoothing tumbled pillows, adjusting a splint or a bandage, calming the bearded children who fretted because they were hopelessly "out of it."

Towards the dawn the sounds of firing gradually grew fainter, and died away as the first pale bands of light appeared in the east. The sparrows under the eaves stirred and commenced a sleepy twittering. Margaret rose as soon as objects in her room were discernible, bathed her face and hands in cold water, and stood awhile at the window watching the day growing over the sea and sombre sky.

The sounds of the battle that passed away to the northward had shaken her nerves as had nothing else in all her experience. Standing there by the open window, drinking in the indescribable freshness of the dawn, she despised herself. She, who had devoted her life to a Purpose, should be above the petty weakness of her sex. Yet the cold fear that had been her bedfellow throughout the night, and was concerned with neither defeat nor victory, haunted her still.

She closed the window, lit a small spirit-lamp on a side table, and, while the kettle boiled, dressed in riding things. The earliness of the hour made it improbable that she would meet

a soul, and yet she dressed carefully, coiling her soft hair, with its silver threads, on the nape of her neck, fastidiously dusting riding boots, and giving a brisk rub to the single spur before she strapped it on. She was adjusting her hard-felt hat before the glass when someone knocked at the door.

She turned questioningly, with hands still raised. "Come in!"

A girl was standing in the doorway; she wore a dressing-gown, and beneath it her slim ankles peeped out of a pair of the felt slippers nurses wear at night.

"Betty! What's the matter?"

"Did you hear the firing?"

Margaret nodded. Was the betrayal of her nerves infectious? Had it communicated itself to the whole staff? For a swift instant she despised her sex—she who had devoted her life to it. "Yes. Another big engagement. We shall be busy. I was going to ride down to the cliffs to see. . . . What's the matter, Betty—can't you sleep? Come in and shut the door; I'll give you a cup of tea." She spoke in her accustomed quiet tone, and crossed to the side table, where the kettle was giving out little fitful puffs of steam.

Betty closed the door and sat down on the edge of the bed, her hands in the side pockets of her dressing-gown. Her hair was plaited loosely in two long plaits, one of which hung

down over her shoulder and somehow gave her face an added effect of extreme youth.

Margaret handed her a cup of tea. "Drink that and run back to bed. No—hop into mine and keep warm. Haven't you slept?"

Betty drank the tea and drew the dressing-gown closer round her young form. "I couldn't sleep. The firing . . . No, I'm quite warm, thanks. But it got on my nerves lying there waiting for it to get light. I heard you moving, and I got up." She passed her hand over her eyes. "After the last time I kept seeing those poor things. . . . I don't mind once we start—I don't mind the operating-table. It's when they come in . . . like dumb things—trying to smile, with their mouths all screwed up and tight." She caught her breath half hysterically.

Margaret put down her cup quickly and sat down by the girl's side. "Betty! Don't talk like that. You mustn't think about it in that way. Listen——"

"It's easy to be calm when you haven't any—anybody out there in the North Sea belonging to you. But I've got a brother and a—and he's a Gunnery Lieutenant," ended Betty a little feebly.

"I know, dear. But you mustn't go to pieces when we all want every bit of pluck and steadiness. We're getting used to it now, too—and I'm sure your brother would like to think you were being as brave as—as he. . . ." She

turned her head and stared out of the window. Was she a hypocrite, she wondered, to try to preach to anyone the virtue of womanly courage when her own heart was sick with she knew not what?

Betty stood up. "I'm a fool," she said abruptly. "Can I come with you? Could you wait ten minutes while I put my riding things on? Miss Dacre said I could take her horse when I wanted to—will you wait for me, Margaret? I'll ride down to the sea with you."

Margaret nodded and rose too. "I'll get the horses saddled while you dress. . . . Bring some biscuits."

She descended the broad oak stairway, crossed the hall, and opened the door of a little room adjoining the main entrance. It was her day sanctum—in scholastic days, the matron's sitting-room, a small apartment, with pretty chintz-covered furniture, and roses in bowls on the table and bookstands. Margaret unhooked a pair of field-glasses hanging on the wall, and passed out into the early morning sunlight.

Betty joined her ten minutes later in the stables, and together they mounted and rode down the long avenue, bordered by firs, out on to the open wold that commanded a view of the sea.

With the dewy turf under them, they shook their impatient horses into a canter until they reached the highest point of a bluff promontory

that stretched out into the sea. Here they reined in and scanned the horizon, side by side.

The water was leaden-coloured, shot with coppery gleams. Below them to the northward the little harbour of the fishing village was stirring to life: wisps of smoke, curling from a score of chimneys, blended with the mists of early morning. Small specks that were people began to move about an arm of the breakwater, towards which a dinghy came stealing sluggishly from one of the anchored fishing craft.

Without speaking, Betty abruptly raised her whip and pointed towards the north. A Torpedo Boat Destroyer was approaching the entrance to the harbour, her funnels jagged with shot-holes pouring out smoke. In silence Margaret handed the glasses to her companion. On the far horizon there were faint columns of smoke north and east. Some were smudges that dissolved and faded to nothing; others grew darker, and presently resolved themselves into distant cruisers passing rapidly south. Margaret's horse lowered his head and began cropping the short grass.

"Margaret," said Betty suddenly, "did you ever care for anybody—a man, I mean?" To Betty's mind the thirty-five years that sat so lightly on Margaret's brow relegated such a possibility, if it ever happened, to a past infinitely remote. For a moment there was no reply.

Margaret stretched out her hand for the glasses, and focused them on the horizon.

"Yes," she said at length, quietly. The Destroyer was entering the harbour; faint confused sounds of cheering drifted up to them.

"Why didn't you marry him? Did you send him away?"

Again a pause, and again came the low-voiced affirmative. Margaret lowered the glasses and returned them to the case slung across her shoulder. "I thought I was doing right. . . . But I was wrong." The night had not been without its lesson. "He's out there." She nodded towards the North Sea, and as she spoke the blunt bows of a hospital ship crept round a distant headland, making towards them. Silence fell between them again.

Margaret broke it. "Betty," she said, "if the time ever comes for you to choose between the love of the man you love and—and anything else in the wide world, don't be misled by other claims . . . by what may seem to be higher claims. Loving and being loved are the highest responsibilities that life holds."

Betty turned her head and stared. "But," she said, "if you think duty doesn't give you the right to——"

"Love gives you all the right a woman wants," replied Margaret, still in the same low, sad tone. "If it's only the right to cry. . . . If you forgo love, you forgo even that." She

gathered the reins and turned her horse. "Now we must get back to bath and dress. There's a lot of work ahead of us."

Neither spoke again as they rode back across the downs. In the filmy blue overhead a lark sang rapturously, pouring out its soul in gladness.

* * * * *

Margaret was in the hall when the first of the long line of stretcher-bearers arrived. As each stretcher was brought in, a surgeon made a brief examination of the wounded man, and he passed through one or other of the wide doorways opening out on either side of the hall. There was a subdued murmur of voices as every moment brought a fresh arrival. Two blue-jackets, who came up the steps carrying a hooded stretcher, stood looking about them as if for orders. The surgeons were all occupied, but, catching sight of Margaret in uniform, with the broad red cross on her breast, the blue-jackets crossed the hall towards her and laid the stretcher at her feet, as if they had brought their burden all this way for her alone.

"Second door on the left," said Margaret. "Wait—is it a bad case?"

"Too late, I'm afraid, Sister," said the stalwart at the head of the stretcher. "'E's died on the way up."

"'Emmerage, Sister," supplemented the other, anxious to display his familiarity with the

technicalities of her profession. "'E wouldn't take 'is turn to be attended to aboard of us—we was in a Destroyer, an' picked 'im up 'angin' on to a spar. Would 'ave the doctor fix up a German prisoner wot was bleedin' to death. Said 'e wasn't in no particular 'urry, speakin' for 'isself. An' 'im a-bleedin' to death, too. As fine a gentleman as ever stepped."

The other nodded, warming, sailor-like, to the hero-worship of an officer. "That's right, Sister. 'E give 'is life for one of them Germans, you might say."

"Is he dead?" asked Margaret in her clear, incisive tones.

"Yes, Sister." The speaker knelt down and turned back the hood, uncovering the face and shoulders of the motionless figure on the stretcher.

For a moment a feeling of giddiness seized Margaret. A great blackness seemed to close round her, shutting out the busy scene, the voices of the bearers, and the shuffle of their feet across the tiled hall. With a supreme effort she mastered herself, and somehow knew she had been waiting for this moment, expecting it. . . .

The man who had been kneeling rose to his feet, and the two stood before her as if awaiting orders. Outside the entrance a motor ambulance arrived and drew up with throbbing engine.

"The mortuary——" she began. "No—

bring him here . . . out of all this." She walked across the hall and opened the door of the small room on the left of the entrance. The scent of roses greeted them: it was the room from which she had fetched her glasses early in the morning.

The two men deposited the stretcher on the floor and came out, glancing at her white face as they passed. "Shall we carry on, Sister?"

"What? . . . Oh, yes, please."

They saluted awkwardly, and left her standing irresolute, as if dazed, in the midst of all the bustle and traffic of suffering.

He had come back to her. Torps, who in life had never broken his word, was also faithful to it in death.

2

THE journey across the lawn to one of the seats in the shelter of the clipped hedge of evergreens was accomplished at length.

The Indiarubber Man lowered himself with a little grimace into the seat, and laid the crutches down beside him. One leg, encased in splints and bandages, was stiffly outstretched on a stool in front of him; his uniform cap—a very disreputable one, with a tarnished badge—was perched on top of the bandages that still swathed his head.

"Phew!" he said; "thank you. That was a bit of a Marathon, wasn't it?" He measured

the distance across the lawn with a humorous eye.

"It was very good for a first attempt," said Betty, considering him professionally. "Is that leg comfortable?"

"Quite, thank you." He leaned back and closed his eyes with a luxurious sigh. "'Pon my word, this is what I call cutting it pretty fat. Fancy my lolling here in the sun, and you . . . and you——" he opened his eyes, regarding her as she stood before him in her trim nurse's uniform. "It's quite like a play, isn't it, where everything comes right in the end? Miss Betty——"

"You mustn't call me that," said Betty primly. "I told you before. You must say 'Nurse.'"

"Can't I say 'Nurse Betty'?"

"My name is Elizabeth. If you wanted to distinguish me from other nurses you might conceivably say 'Nurse Elizabeth.' But even that's not necessary, as I'm the only nurse here at the moment."

The Indiarubber Man looked cautiously round the sunlit enclosure. "True. So you are——"

"And it's time for your beef-tea," added Betty severely, marching off in the direction of the distant wing.

Her patient watched her slim form retreating and vanish down a green alley. "You

dear," he said, "you *dear!*" He meditated awhile. "It's a rum world," he soliloquised. "Torps has gone. The Young Doc.'s gone. The Pay's gone."

He mused awhile. "But we gave 'em an almighty hammering. And here am I, alive and kicking again. And there's Betty. . . . It's a rum world." He bent forward and gathered a daisy growing in the border beside his seat. With his bleached, rather unsteady fingers, he began picking the petals from it one by one.

"She does, she doesn't. She does, she doesn't. She doesn't," repeated the Indiarubber Man in a woeful voice.

A thrush hopped across the lawn, and paused to regard him with one bright eye. Apparently reassured, it deftly secured and swallowed a worm.

The Indiarubber Man laughed. "Doesn't anybody love you either?" he said.

Betty reappeared in the distance carrying a tray in her hands. The thrush, as if realising that two is company and three none, flew away.

Betty handed a cup to the invalid. "There's a piece of toast too—you must soak it in the beef-tea, and here is a little bell. If you want anything, or you aren't comfortable, you can ring it."

"I see." The Indiarubber Man gravely

accepted all three gifts and laid them on the seat beside him. "Thank you awfully. But you aren't going away, are you?"

"Of course I am," said Betty. "I'm very busy. You *must* remember that this is a hospital, that you're a patient and I'm a nurse." She moved off sedately.

"Miss Betty!" called the Indiarubber Man. "I mean 'Nurse.'" Betty turned and retraced her footsteps. "Wouldn't it be awful if I was suddenly taken very ill indeed—if I came over all of a tremble, and tried to ring the toast and soaked the bell in my beef-tea?"

"From what I've seen of you during the last six weeks," replied Betty the Hospital Nurse, "such a thing wouldn't surprise me a little bit." She left him to his graceless self.

For a while after she had gone the Indiarubber Man tried to read a book. Tiring of that, he lit a pipe and smoked it without enthusiasm. Tobacco tasted oddly flavourless and unfamiliar. Then he remembered his beef-tea and drank it obediently, soaking the toast as he had been bidden. Remained the bell. For a long time he sat staring at it.

"Much better get it over," he said aloud. "One way or the other."

Cautiously he looked round. No one was in sight; the windows at the back of the hospital that overlooked this secluded lawn had been the

windows of class-rooms, and were of frosted glass. With the aid of his crutches he got up unsteadily, and then, maintaining a precarious balance with one crutch, he thrust the other one under the seat leverwise, and with an effort tipped it over backwards on to the flowerbed.

This accomplished, the Indiarubber Man looked round again to convince himself that the manœuvre was unobserved. Reassured on this point, he lowered himself down gingerly over the seat until he was lying on his back with his legs in the air and his head in a clump of marigolds. In this attitude he seized the bell and rang it furiously, feebly waving his uninjured leg the while.

The moments passed. From his prostrate position behind the seat he was unable to obtain a view of the lawn, and stopped ringing the bell to listen. He heard a faint cry in the distance, and then the flutter of skirts. The next instant Betty was bending over him, white and breathless.

"Oh!" she cried, "how *did* it happen? Did the seat tip over backwards—are you hurt?" and kneeling beside him raised his unhallowed head. The Indiarubber Man closed his eyes.

"You told me to ring if I wasn't comfortable, and I wasn't a bit. I hate the smell of marigolds too. No—please don't move; I'm

very comfortable now." Betty looked wildly in the direction of the house for help.

"I heard the bell," she said in a queer, breathless little voice, "and I just came out to look . . . and then I ran. I ought to have called someone. Ring the bell—I can't move you by myself. We must have assistance. How *did* this happen?"

The Indiarubber Man opened his eyes. "The seat tipped over backwards."

"But *how?*"

"It—it just tipped—as it were."

"Will you promise to lie still for one minute while I run for help—are you in pain?"

"No. As a matter of fact, I wanted to ask you a question."

"What?" asked Betty, reaching for the bell with her disengaged hand.

"Betty, will you marry me?"

The Indiarubber Man's bandaged head was deposited once more among the marigolds. Betty rose to her feet, astonishment and indignation joining forces to overcome laughter within her. The resultant of all three was something suspiciously like tears.

"*What?* Oh, I do believe—I don't believe it was an accident at all——"

"Will you, Betty?" queried the Indiarubber Man from the depths of the marigolds.

Voices sounded beyond the yews. A white-coated orderly appeared in the distance, stood

a moment in astonishment, and came running across the grass towards them.

"Quick! There's someone coming. I swear I won't be budged till you answer."

The orderly arrived panting. "What's up, miss, an accident?"

"Oh," gasped Betty. "*Yes!*"

The Indiarubber Man suffered himself to be moved.

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